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Performance in a Can:  
Considering Recorded Theatrical Performance

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## **Losses and Gains: an Introduction to Recorded Performance Documents**

Loss and disappearance are not easy concepts. The moment at which one's experience transforms to a memory marks the end of an involvement, an engagement with persons, works, or events that have impacted an individual in some way. Live performance absorbs an audience, changes their perceptions, and ceases to exist in the course of a production. Audiences have devised many ways of dealing with the loss of a performance. Post-show discussions, reviews, playbills, and stills all provide evidence of the intangible performances that have passed. With proof that a production did occur, the witness is free to remember the event as she wishes.

In the last three decades, the spectator's freedom to remember has been challenged by the process of recording live performances.<sup>1</sup> The memories of a viewer turned witness can now be challenged by the existence of an audiovisual record. Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks (2001) write, '[m]emories sometimes seem to escape time, in that they stay with us' (p.42). By comparison, recorded performances are constant reminders of the time that has passed; live performance is no longer impervious to the ageing process. Where memory preserves the theatrical experience, recordings document the theatrical form. The two methods of remembrance often complement one another, but can also be at odds as technical and emotional recall yield very different results.

While these recordings do change the nature of spectatorship, as they preserve the one-time moment for repeat viewing; they are invaluable as educational and archival documents. Audiences must now adapt their ideas of a performance's

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<sup>1</sup> While the term "recording" encompasses a variety of audio, visual, and audiovisual formats, I am primarily concerned with the general debate regarding the process of recording live performance. Recordings referenced and consulted in this work are audiovisual in nature, and of both analogue and digital formats. Considerations of a specific form will be noted in the text.

finality, to come to an understanding that recorded performances do not reverse the disappearance of a live production. Recorded performances are one type of evidence amongst many, intended to aid in acts of remembrance. The value of these documents cannot be overstated. Theatre's ephemeral nature cannot be preserved to the detriment of theatre and performance studies. Processes of studying audiovisual documentation are still infantile when compared to the means and methods of approaching more traditional materials (texts, promptbooks, set and costume designs). Reaching an understanding of recorded performances as documents, rather than performances, will accomplish a great deal in the course of furthering the usefulness of these materials. This clarification of expectations will give rise to more informed recording, distribution, and viewing.

In the course of this thesis I will examine key issues surrounding the creation, uses, and theories of recorded performance documentation. The first chapter, 'The Recorded Performance Debate', provides an overview of the discourse and criticism surrounding the creation and use of audiovisual performance documents. 'Canning The Trinity: Liveness, Memory, Ritual, and Recorded Performance' examines the most frequently cited opposition to creation of recorded performances: the document's seeming inability to preserve elements of liveness and ritual, and its subversion of memory in performance preservation. My consideration of recorded performances in traditional archives, 'Building a Memory or Canned for Emergency Use', begins with a personal account of accessing records at Victoria and Albert Museum's Theatre Collection at Blythe house, and goes on to consider general theories of the archive, concluding that while recordings are certainly appropriate archival material, new practices and methodologies must be implemented in order to improve upon existing audiovisual materials, and aid practitioners and institutions in

the creation of future documents. 'Recipes: Towards a Methodology in Hopes of Improving Form' considers the necessity for supplementary materials and critical responses which approach the recordings specifically as documents. This final chapter contains my own responses to a series of documents accessed at Blythe House and urges users of recorded performances to clarify individual expectations when accessing and utilising recordings.

Recorded performance documents will not serve every purpose for everyone, but they do provide audiovisual accounts of performances, which have previously been unavailable. A failure to recognise the opportunities created by increased documentation and access is simply irresponsible in an age of digital technology. Care should be taken to preserve live theatrical experience in the process of documenting, but a fear of change should not prevent these recordings' creation and circulation. Documentation in every field of academia is being altered by the proliferation of digital media, this format has not only been embraced because of the range of materials it makes available, but because of the ease of access which it provides to researchers at all levels of study. Further delays in the process of creating recorded performance documents can only thwart the progress of scholars, students, and practitioners. If these recordings are approached with an understanding of the capabilities and limitations of the form, the opportunities for widespread access, discourse, and study are immense.

In 1955, James W. Andrews published 'An International Play Library on Film'. In this article, Andrews (1955) advocated the creation a body that would record, store and circulate recorded performance. He also laid out a budget and an operation model, and proposed

...as its governing body a board of eight directors, to be selected from the educational and professional theatre, whose responsibility it would be to select

a certain number of plays each year to be filmed by IPL and then permanently placed on file by that organization (p.239).

Andrews' proposal is feasible in vision, and has only become more possible with the passage of time. Nonetheless, fifty-five years later we are no closer to the establishment of such an organisation. In spite of technological leaps and bounds, the proliferation of equipment, and ease of communication, no body exists solely for the purpose of collecting and making available invaluable audiovisual records of live performance.

Indeed, these materials have been archived with other more traditional materials. Most recently, the documents have been made available as streaming files on websites and online databases, but still no body as Andrews envisioned has risen to the task of collecting and making use of recorded performance documents. As Andrews (1955) suggested over half a century ago,

Let us imagine an organization to be known as the International Play Library on Film, one which would possess, when formed, two prime functions: to provide public service and education of the type afforded by museums and libraries, and to stimulate and aid the teaching of theatre arts all over the world (p.239).

In spite of technological advancements since the publishing of 'An International Play Library on Film', the article remains relevant, as the need for such a body still exists. Unfortunately, the last decades have been filled with debates as to whether performance *should* be recorded, rather than discussions of *how* to document, store and circulate these recordings. The availability of user-friendly equipment (and consumer-friendly prices) has led to a proliferation of recordings, causing a pause for consideration of the products of these ideal circumstances. Andrews called for action, but his request been met only with further discussion and tentative practices. Recordings have been made, but with little consideration for access and usage.



The International Play Library on Film must be revisited as a viable option for recorded performance creation, preservation, and education before the values of countless documents are forgotten in discussions that focus on problems to be solved, rather than benefits to be gained. Valuable images and sounds are poorly represented in a debate over whether or not it is appropriate or necessary to record live performance; this debate must finally be put to rest. Liveness, memory and ritual must not be lionised at the cost of documentation. Traditional archives can no longer be seen as the only option for storage and access as scholarly resources become increasingly digitised. Work must be undertaken to improve access if the approach to recorded performances is to change. The International Play Library on Film will only be a reality when recorded performances are recognised as documents<sup>2</sup> for research and pleasure, documents which deserve to be treated as valuable materials.

Andrews' dream of universal access to performance recordings is not the only support for the creation and distribution of these documents. Contemporary scholars have also recognised the value of recordings. Patrice Pavis (1982) describes recorded performances as the evolved counterpart to more traditional materials.

Video recording is the modern equivalent of the performance production book, but it is much more precise and allows one to consider all stage materials in their proper relationships (p.123).

Rather than defining video recordings as replacement performances or copies of a live event, Pavis (1982) cases expectations and establishes recordings as documents. This distinction both decreases expectations of the recording as substitute performance, and elevates the recording to document status. Recorded performances are the latest documentary evidence of live productions; their seemingly complete nature has caused confusion in the course of recognising them as such. Like any other material

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<sup>2</sup> Further consideration of recordings as documents can be found in Chapter 1.

which preserves, references, or serves as an aid in the course of study, recorded performances should be recognised as documents.

A class screening of a recording of Cheek by Jowl's *As You Like It*, transformed my own views of recorded performance. The quality of the recording was not excellent, and at times, the long shots made me feel as though I were in a stadium watching a baseball game on a large screen. However, the acting was incredible and I was mesmerised. In no way was this recording equivalent, or even similar to a live event, but still this recording had preserved something which was of use to me. At this moment, the recording served a purpose as a document, rather than an insufficient surrogate. Once my expectation that a recording provide a perfect replica vanished, a host of new materials were suddenly available to me. Bunraku costuming in motion, blocking possibilities for arena seating, and interaction with properties and set pieces all took on new meanings in a form outside of the live moment. Recorded performances suddenly became recorded performance *documents*, and this distinction has enhanced my repertoire of available materials in ways no anthology has been able to.

Steve Dixon (1999) goes a step further in establishing the recording as document. He not only advocates treatment of the recording as document, but also asks that researchers recognise the superiority of the recording over traditional documents for some scholarly purposes. Dixon (1999) states that a recorded performance

...constitutes an ideal medium for the documentation and analysis of performance, for the study of the interface between theory and practice, and for new ways to approach and present academic writing (p.170).

As data becomes increasingly digitised, the act of recording live performances carries additional weight. The hesitancy of should we? will be replaced by declarations of we must. With increased technological capability comes the additional responsibility of contributing information and documents in audiovisual formats. The preservation of past events is no longer limited to still photographs and written accounts – the documentation of live performance is no exception.

If not now, when? seems the appropriate question in increasing the visibility and status of recorded performances. As live performance events become increasingly dependent upon technological developments, means of studying these performances should not be limited to methods devised prior to the rise of recording apparatuses.

Each year that goes by without a permanent record of outstanding productions both here and abroad is postponing the benefits which succeeding generations should rightfully reap from our foresight (Andrews 1955, p.241).

Fifty-two years is postponement enough. The development of recorded performance documents and their distribution must become a priority if contemporary theatre is to be preserved. The salvaging of those recordings made over the past four decades must occur if theatre of the past is going to be accessible to future generations dependent upon televisual mediums. Recorded performances exist as an extraordinary untapped resource; they are not gaining value with age, but losing relevancy as they become outdated and indecipherable. Prejudices against these recordings must be laid aside in order for the work of preservation to not only continue with established methods, but improve with the implementation of new practices which will provide greater opportunities for practitioners, scholars, and students alike.

The positive uses of recorded performances are frequently overshadowed by concerns regarding the translation of performance from live event to recorded object. A balance must be struck between indiscriminate recording and a prejudicial lack of action. Marvin Carlson (1981) discusses the difficulty of striking a balance between criticism and condemnation stating,

Both the first enthusiasm for the new medium (when it was often hailed as a way at last to make permanent the theatrical experience) and the ensuing disillusionment, when the major phenomenological differences between the two media led many to dismiss film completely as a record of staging, were equally unjust insofar as they were based upon the expectation that spectators watching a film could experience essentially the same sensations as they would watching the original theatrical performance (p.64).<sup>3</sup>

Carlson's (1981) call for this adjustment in expectation is a precursor to the discourse that is overviewed in the following chapter. The hesitancy to create recorded performance was not an immediate reaction to those first recorded performances; it was a position which developed as the complications of translating a live event to recorded document became more obvious. As Diana Taylor (2003) states, '...performance also has a history of untranslatability' (p.6). Approaching recorded performance documents requires that a viewer consider the inherent complications, recognise the difficulty of translation, and align one's expectations, persisting, in hopes of discovery.

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<sup>3</sup> This unconventional numbering of pages is specific to the style of *Cahiers Theatre Louvain Filmer Le Theatre*.

## Are Peas too Good to be Canned? The Recorded Performance Debate

'From theatre studies – the "maternal partner," according to Turner – performance studies inherits another form of radicalism: its proclivity toward the avant-garde that values originality, the transgressive, and again, the "authentic"' (Taylor 2003, p.9).

An unspoken distrust of the recorded live performance has been referenced, alluded to, whispered about, and discussed in the broader context of capturing the live moment. In a few instances, articles and conferences<sup>4</sup> have been devoted to the question of recorded performances and the ongoing consideration of, should we or shouldn't we?<sup>5</sup> Even as technological processes have improved, limited research and resources have been implemented in the study of theatre's newest performance document. This lack of study is most likely due to the document's audiovisual nature. The televisual capture of live performance is no longer celebrated as a new means of analysing performance; nor are the document's capacities for education, rehearsal and preservation discussed without one first having to justify a recording's legitimacy.

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<sup>4</sup> The academic discourse surrounding the recording of theatrical performance has been discussed in a variety of forums. Robert Ernststein (1988) edited a collection of papers entitled, *Theatre and television: papers read at the International Conference held in Hilversum from 1 to 8 September 1986, organised by the International Federation for Theatre Research and the Dutch Broadcasting Company (N.O.S.)*, which also explores concerns about the process of audiovisual documentation of live performance. *Cahiers Theatre Louvain's Filmer le Theatre* was published 5 years prior, and was comprised of articles which considering the recording of theatre, and the interaction of the cinematic medium and live theatre. I have chosen to use the New Theatre Quarterly articles in providing an overview of the debate as these articles are more recent, and consider both those issues raised in the mid 1980s and those that have risen with increased technological use.

<sup>5</sup> Walter Benjamin's 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936 in Arendt 1999) has greatly influenced the discourse regarding recorded performance. While I will not explicitly reference this work, it is important to note the influence which Benjamin has had upon discussions surrounding recorded performance at all levels of discourse. The assertion that '[m]echanical reproduction of a work of art, however, represents something new' (p. 212) opened the floodgates of discourse on this particular topic, and others like it. Benjamin first recognised the changes that technology would bring to art, and stated truths about the positive and negative outcomes of preserving live moments. The basis of any subsequent work is Benjamin's 1936 essay; even when it is not explicitly referenced, it has influenced the work.

The documents continue to proliferate while their necessity, function, and usefulness are continually questioned. This hesitancy is leaving potentially powerful resources untapped; an unwillingness to examine (or even define) these documents has left potentially powerful educational, archival, and dare I suggest, entertaining recordings under-used and misinterpreted as an unwillingness to examine these documents has led to uninformed, misused viewings.

This wariness of the recorded performance is discussed in a series of articles that appeared in *New Theatre Quarterly* between 1985 and 2000. Marco de Marinis (1985), Gay McAuley (1994), Annabelle Melzer (1995a, 1995b), Denise Varney and Rachel Fensham (2000) examine the recording process and the use of the documents in a variety of contexts. All five articles also address the often unspoken, but present distrust of these documents, a distrust which has led many individuals<sup>6</sup> to question the value of these recordings for educational purposes. Additionally, the articles address issues of nomenclature, intention, use, and the establishment of reading skills. Although each article explores different complications and capabilities of recording, the same fears must be put to rest at the beginning of each article in order for the authors to have the freedom, or permission to take the documents under critical consideration. The same battle is being fought again and again as each author must first give the subject legitimacy before presenting more pertinent, complicated research. If recorded performance is ever to evolve beyond the mediocre copies which are so often critiqued, then scholars must be allowed to discuss recordings without first having to justify the existence of their documents. As Denise Varney and Rachel

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<sup>6</sup> Peter Brook spoke out vehemently against the practice of recording live theatrical events in the early 1990s, but has since recanted these statements, and created some of the most circulated recordings of British theatre (Jill Evans personal communication, 30 March 2007). Peggy Phelan's *Unmarked* (1993) criticised various means of making ephemera permanent (discussed in more detail in chapter 3).

Fensham (2000) state, '...it is too late to be coy about electronic modes of representation' (p.90). Indeed, electronic technology will continue to find its way into performances and their documentation, as these methods have become standards for communicating ideas and preserving events.

Nonetheless, those who examine recorded performance find themselves answering the same questions over and over again.

Fifty years after the advent of video, performance documentation is still struggling to define the parameters of its activity, to describe what it wants to do and how best to do it (Melzer 1995b, p.275).

In spite of research, conferences, and publication fears still loom large; a collective hesitancy still exists. The recording is not quite theatrical, not wholly cinematic, and as such exists as the bastard child whose status and legacy are constantly in question. As existing recordings circulate in educational and archival circles, the form has seen little improvement in the past two decades, as there has been little research dedicated to best practices for creation and usage. Annabelle Melzer (1995a) expresses the complications caused by this problematic cycle of prejudice, stating,

...there is something old and tired about this as well; certainly about questioning whether performance documentation should be done-as if one would still ask 'should plays be adapted to film?' Both questions seem to belong to another generation (p.148).

This bafflement arises from watching a generation of professionals constantly check their e-mails, publish online, and consult JSTOR while questioning the progress of performance documentation. Advancements have been embraced and praised in other areas of live performance, while audiovisual documentation continues to be approached tentatively.

In order for a means, methods, and standards to be established these uncertainties must finally be put to rest. Answers to questions about form and usage, and solutions to problems both real and potential, have been stated in articles, conference proceedings, and the continued practice of documentation. In the course of this chapter I will explore the answers that have been given in the hope that I may then be able to further my own research without having to repeatedly legitimise my subject. I then hope to explore the solutions for form and approach in analysis that have been put forward (solutions which seem to have been repeatedly ignored) in order to establish that a body of knowledge does exist, problems have been identified, and some constructive conclusions have been drawn.

### **Hesitancy in Practice and Distrust of Product**

The existence of a production beyond the auditorium has always occurred in some form: audience members discuss, critics write, and playbills are not always tossed aside as one exits the auditorium; as such, means and methods exist for constructive analysis of the materials left behind after a performance's passing. The proliferation of stills, practitioners' journals, publicity materials, and rehearsal logs would seem to suggest that there is a hunger for any trace of the dearly departed (Senelick 1997). Archives of other materials (pieces of performances rather than substitutions) are consulted and archived, but recordings have yet to be defined as archival material (McAuley 1994, p.183). Recorded performances continue to be studied timidly, and analysed only after a disclaimer has been put forward. Marco de Marinis (1985) states that it is impossible to properly study a production without giving consideration to outside cultural factors and advocates a system of recording which reflects the given historical moment. He considers the recording to be a type of material, but a more complete record (p.384). However, it is this 'completeness'



which causes alarm and begs the question of whether the document exists as evidence or as an entity unto itself.

The very suggestion that a performance can be wholly captured seems to simultaneously elicit both fear and outrage. While the document may be complete in an audiovisual sense, these are only the physical components of a production.

For the process of documenting a performance by making an electronic 'replica' is fraught with problems, and the attack on performance documentation, even by supporters, begins as an attack on just this claim of the film or videotape to be a "record" of the live performance (Melzer 1995a, p.148).

Critics of recorded performance must bear in mind that these documents are not created to be complete. Nor do those who record and make use of these materials intend to emulate all aspects live audience experience.

[i]t seems that video recordings are still either judged (and feared) as "replacement performances"... rather than in relation to their effectiveness as documents. (McAuley 1994, p.183)

An inherent prejudice exists against the process of reproducing that which had been impervious to replication.

Another hesitancy which has been cited is the actor's concern over potential criticism, criticism that may be unjust due to the transformation of a performance from stage to screen. '...[T]he predominant fear is that, without their presence, actors will lose control over their image and its distribution' (Varney and Fensham 2000, p.92). Fears over distribution seem unjustified in a litigious society that closely monitors copyright and intended use. Diana Taylor (2003) believes that ownership concerns have evolved beyond the resulting materials of an event to also include the ephemera itself. 'As laws have increasingly come into place to protect intellectual and artistic property, people have also considered ways to protect "intangible" property'

(p.23). Material laws protect the event turned object, as recordings, stills, or prompt books are subject to protection as tangible evidence of a fleeting production. While the recording may make a performance or production available for criticism, it also gives ownership of disappeared works to the practitioners who created fleeting productions.

If the performers' concerns are not distribution or intense criticism then perhaps hesitancy can be credited to 'the disappointing results' of past attempts (McAuley 1994, p.183). While critics are concerned about potential recordings being 'too good', others are speaking to the amateur appearance of preserved performance. Jonathan Miller states that recorded performances "run the risk of looking permanently quaint without ever having enjoyed the privilege of being briefly brilliant" (1986 cited Melzer 1995, p.265). Indeed, the process of watching a recorded performance is fraught with those moments where one convinces herself that this must have looked better live. At these moments, it is imperative to bear in mind that documents are not accessed for the same purposes a performance is attended. Frequently, those who document, distribute or view recorded performances state that the document's nature only proves the power of theatre's live and ephemeral nature.

Jerzy Koenig, head of theatre division of Polish Television, raised this issue at the Warsaw Conference: "Theatre on video is dead theatre. We who deal with theatre on video make the death of the theatre at the end of the performance more difficult. It is like keeping a patient alive in intensive care. We see signs on the monitor, but the question is 'is it (the theatre) still alive?'" (Melzer 1995b, p.265).

Recorded performance documents certainly blur the lines between the live (living) moment of performance and the evidence of that which has passed. A recorded performance manages to preserve in part, but with the whole experience missing, one question's the wholeness of that which she sees. Movements are being made and

sound is being emitted, but is this recording the life of theatrical performance? Each viewing of a recording is a process of conjuring shadows of that which has passed, only to acknowledge they are nothing more than shadows. The perception of 'dead theatre' and the traumatic imagery which it conjures are related to memory and preservation through recall. While memory is sufficient in many instances regarding performance, in other areas it proves inadequate.

Varney and Fensham (2000) state that individual memory has long been considered '....the legitimate and dynamic record of the performance' (p.90). Still, this assignment of performance to memory was born of necessity; there were formerly no alternative methods for the preservation of a production. With the advancement of technology it would seem foolish to continue to prize memory as the '...only fit place for performance to be stored' (Varney and Fensham 2000, p.91). I will examine issues of memory, observance, and the process of transforming ephemeral events into permanent objects more closely in the subsequent chapter. Regardless of the object vs. memory debate, even the most amateur of documents could serve as an adept visual aid or auditory prompt. As a historian, Marvin Carlson (1981) has expressed the function that performance documents can serve in elevating the objectivity of study.

Even those fortunate enough to witness the original are unable to return to check the accuracy of their memory or to test subsequent hypotheses against it, and for others there remains only the thinner substance of an experience filtered through the selective consciousness and reportage of intermediaries (p.b1).

While memory of experience is still valid in study, to neglect usage of available materials is simply irresponsible if one is attempting to create a fair and complete analysis of any facet of a genre or production.

As soon as the subject of a "credible record" is raised, a record that will be used for study and research, another battle cry is sounded: is the performance document an "objective" record of the performance? (Melzer 1995b, p.262).

The simple response to this question would seem: no document provides a truly objective account of an event. Given the subjective nature of individual perception, a document never achieves truly unbiased status. No, the recorded document will not exist as a record which is wholly objective due to decisions which are made to shoot or cut or frame the performance in a given way. Under best circumstances, one would hope that these decisions would be made in consultation with a director in order to best convey the artistic decisions at play. Still, objectivity is unattainable in performance analysis as the personal preferences of a spectator will always influence her opinion, and in the case of a professional, her analysis. Varney and Fensham (2000) see the video's potential for analysis as one of its strengths, rather than weaknesses.

We are not saying that the video is objective, but that different researchers can see the same record and produce different analyses, of which none is more authoritative than any other (p.92).

The video itself is not meant to provide objectivity; it is meant to exist as a material from which various critics and historians can draw in order to increase the dialogue surrounding a performance. The record itself exists as one resulting document; a document that will make relevant fields of study more objective in its accessibility by providing access to theatrical images and events outside of a theatrical space.

An examination of the criticism of recorded performance is not intended to dismiss these evaluations, but to address those issues that have been raised. The worth of any document should be evaluated; a hesitation towards recorded performance is justifiable, the usefulness of these documents should be evaluated prior to use.

However, multiple purposes have been repeatedly established and the practice itself continues to be condemned. 'So, at its extreme we have: "no, never document, no one can ever experience theatre outside the unique performance space"' (Melzer 1995a, p.148). A recorded performance does not strive to replace or subsume the theatrical art form; it exists in order to aid in processes of study and to increase accessibility. Melzer (1995b) rejects this desire to condemn documentation of performance stating, '...must we not welcome its intrusion as the only way in which we can see, preserve, and study certain aspects of theatre performance?' (p.266). Looking at the theatre through a lens or on a screen will not cause its demise. A failure to embrace new means of study almost certainly will. As educational and archival materials become increasingly digitised theatre scholars will find themselves struggling to produce significant study with few available resources. Recorded performances will not save or revolutionise theatrical practice; these documents will provide a more complete record of a form that has already become increasingly dependent upon audiovisual equipment and materials. The process of recording is not an infringement of one form upon another, but one medium's celebration of another medium's successes. Ultimately, the recording '...can never replace the performance because the one precedes the other' (Varney 2000, p.94). The recording should not cause fear, as it only exists as a product of the theatre which critics seek to protect.

### **Nomenclature**

'It is alongside the varying "names" given to this filmed-theatre-product, alongside the varying descriptions of "filmed theatre", the varying intentions with which one comes to the filming, the relationship between process and product in performance documentation, between the ends and the means, that one plunges into the problematic waters of contemporary stage/screen debate: the issues surrounding performance documentation' (Melzer 1995a, p.157).

With concerns regarding the act of recording significantly aired, theorists, historians, archivists, and practitioners must agree upon a nomenclature to be used in further discourse. Future discussion must occur, discussion which will prove more effective if a working title for these documents can be agreed upon. Without a name, recordings stand to be continually misunderstood and misinterpreted. Annabelle Melzer's 'Best Betrayal Part 1' (1995a) contains a section titled 'A Confusion of Nomenclature' in which she states:

And so, though not yet having arrived at either a state of clarity or purpose in the "documenting", critics and practitioners have moved towards the archaic ceremony of the "naming of names"-what to call this object which, in a continuing approach-avoidance conflict, they perceive as deceitful yet essential, and about which they still have enormous ambivalence (p.150).

Melzer (1995a) goes on to explore the debate over the naming of this object, the offspring of the theatrical form. While she implies that the debate has brought academics no closer to choosing a name, and the prevalence of names has only complicated the process of legitimizing the document. In order to properly defend the performance recording advocates of the form must be allowed to evoke one name in explanation, rather than being forced to account for a 'multiplicity of names.' (p.150) The use of numerous monikers has hindered further discussion as documentations are frequently conflated with adaptations. A lack of clarity in establishing what constitutes a recorded performance, and subsequent failures to utilise specific terminology in further discussion has not only limited discourse, but has also needlessly complicated the process of accessing materials surrounding a subject area which has not been comprehensively documented.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> While conducting my own research I would input 5 to 7 search terms to find materials. Corresponding articles and works would have no obvious connections as the range of terms used in referencing recorded performance documents is so broad.

The proliferation of names has also been a significant factor in the negative connotations associated with recorded documentation. Descriptions of the object have frequently taken on a negative tint as 'lacks' are summarised and described as a '*faithful betrayal*' or a '*respectful forgery*' (Marinis 1985, p.388) by the same individuals who are promoting acceptance of the document. Of the five articles I cite three made use of negative language in titling their pieces- Melzer's 'Best Betrayal' (1995a, 1995b) is a response to Marinis' 'Faithful Betrayal' (1985) while Varney and Fensham make reference to a recording's seeming 'lack' with 'More –and Less-Than' (2000). Only McAuley abstains from negativity with 'The Video Documentation of Theatrical Performance' (1994), the length of which attests to the lack of a cohesive title. The process of naming, the complications of labelling and stamping are not limited to theatre studies.

The transitional nature of our time is reflected in the very labels we invent – post-industrial and post-modern – to identify the social, economic, and cultural forces at work in our society. The common prefix, "post-", lays emphasis on the idea that we are now leaving something behind but have not progressed so far as to effectively identify the new paradigm and give it its own name (Hanhardt 1986, p.11).

Perhaps, recorded performance is best identified as post-theatre. Such a title is not meant to suggest that theatre has passed, and a resulting document exists for the purpose of replacement, but that recordings exist as evidence of a performance no longer accessible once the theatrical event has ended. The moment of access to this evidence has yet to be determined. Not quite knowing how to term these electronic remembrances, we leave them unnamed; these post-performance documents must find identity beyond statements of their 'non' status.

The mimetic nature of the document makes this naming process a sensitive one; the document itself is not a performance, nor is it a film or video. To define a

performance recording as an adaptation would be inaccurate as those stage plays adapted to film are an entity unto themselves.<sup>8</sup> Still, determining the one title which performance documentation *is not* does not solve the problem of what performance documentation *is*.

Performance transferred to this new moving image document, is called a “record”, a “document”, a “transcription”, a “transformation”, an “adaptation”, a “photographic conception”, a “photostat”, a “representation”, and a “reproduction” (Melzer 1995a, p.150).

This proliferation of names complicates the classification of these documents as the implication of each term modifies expectations of the recording. In the course of properly naming these materials it seems that identifying a broad category has been the first step. Varney and Fensham (2000) simply define a recording as being ‘...“an object” able to produce meanings’ (p.96). This definition empowers a recording over other forms of documentation; implying that its capacity for production and even its existence as reproduction, assign these ‘objects’ with value greater than the evidence provided by other resulting materials (publicity, programs, journals, etc). However, the vagueness of the term also fails to distinguish a recording as a document rather than a replacement performance or adaptation.

In contrast, Marco de Marinis’ (1985) definition of recordings states that recorded performances should ‘...not [be] considered as the only theatrical document but, more properly, as one document-one of the traces...’ (p.388). To include recorded performance amongst other traditional materials is to ensure that its seeming ‘complete’ nature is not mistaken for replication. To identify recorded performances

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<sup>8</sup> Annabelle Melzer (1995a) states ‘[t]he shift to a studio space seems to me the critical dividing line between documentation and adaptation’ (p.152). This paper is concerned solely with the documentation of theatrical performance, the process of recording live events, rather than those recordings which modify a live performance and present it as a cinematic object.



as documents is to acknowledge its capabilities and potential function without misleading potential users as to the purpose its mimetic nature serves. Still, elevating or equating recordings above or with other theatrical documents does not speak to the unique nature of each resulting material. As no two productions or even performances are the same, no two recordings follow an exact formula for creation. Varney and Fensham (2000) state that

[t]he video is not simply a document or replacement text either written or performative, and in this sense it is not an agent: it has agency (p.94).

While I would agree that performance recordings most certainly have agency, I take issue with the statement that '[t]he video is not simply a document...' (Varney and Fensham 2000, p.94). No document is entirely simple, which is to say that no document is beyond consideration within a field of study; this is especially true in the case of documents which exist as the products of performance. If these documents were simple their analysis would not be involved, the information gleaned would not be relevant to study, and their scholarly usefulness could be easily challenged as their 'simplicity' would render further investigation futile. Identifying performance recordings as documents is the first step in signalling usage and intention to the audiences that are criticised for being misinformed about a recording's capabilities. The potential of recordings should not be overlooked in classifying these documents with more traditional records. All performance documents exist for a purpose. One would not attempt to study staging conventions of early 20<sup>th</sup> Century theatre by examining payroll records of New York actors anymore than one would watch a recorded performance hoping to glean biographical information about the Royal Shakespeare Company's resident carpenter.

A document is not limited by intention in creation, but every document does not serve every purpose. The recorded performance is most certainly a document, one which provides a greater capacity for investigation and education in certain contexts. Annabelle Melzer (1995a) has settled upon a term which considers the capabilities of the form while remaining open to a variance of factors from recording to recording,

I have used the term "performance documentation" to cover all the various types of filmed documents of live performance-filmed in order to produce a "record" of the event for research and study, as well as performance filmed with a wide audience in mind. The document may be recorded on film or video, it may be recorded for screening on a large screen or for the small televisual frame (p.151).

While I have found Melzer's definition to be the most useful in the context of my own research, I will continue to use the term *recorded performance document* as I believe this phrase best communicates the nature and capabilities of the audiovisual records of live performance.<sup>9</sup>

An original, live performance can be titled as a production, a play, a presentation, an occurrence, or a show. Each term is more or less appropriate dependent upon the specificities of a given dramatic piece. The theatrical form is far more established and as such, academics have the luxury of interchangeable terms. Recorded performance may eventually achieve status, but the nuances of titles and categorisations must still be seriously considered when formally discussing or publishing on the subject. Belittling a recording's status as a simple document is as dangerous as elevating it above more traditional written evidence of production. Expectations should not be lowered as the form continues to be perfected, nor should the document's capabilities be exaggerated beyond its usefulness.

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<sup>9</sup> I will also use the terms *recorded document* and *recorded performance* as these shortened phrases also convey the nature of the documents considered in this work, and allow for variety in repeatedly referencing my subject matter.

### Stating Intention in Hopes of Improving the Product

'Fifty years after the advent of video, performance documentation is still struggling to define the parameters of its activity, to describe what it wants to do and how best to do it' (Melzer 1995b, p.275).

Shaping expectations or simply stating an intention in the creation of a performance document would do a great deal to improve the usage, analysis, and subsequent criticism of recorded performance. As most recorded pieces simply begin-with no explanation of the piece's value or function-the viewer of the recording is unaware of what she is meant to glean from a specific document. If a given recording was created for the purpose of documenting a specific actor's work, and a viewer intended to use the document to analyse a particular aspect of set design and construction, the document itself would be deemed useless, when it had simply been misused. In the course of stating intention practitioners must bear in mind the realities of recorded document usage. Recorded performances can be divided into three categories-those intended for archival preservation, those developed as educational materials, and those intended for mass distribution and commercial sale. Obviously, the three areas do overlap as archives are frequently educational and commercial sale can involve the distribution of educational materials. Still, simply determining which of the three general purposes a document is meant to serve clarifies usage and states a usefulness for scholars, archivists, educators, or the generic viewer.

Frequently, concerns regarding the proliferation of recorded performances seem to hinge on a fear of mass distribution, the removal of a performance from the sanctity of its original playing space. However, these recorded performances are not heralded as the season's hottest DVD releases. The at home viewer is not waiting impatiently for *Spamalot* to be released on DVD, while opting to forego the live

performance. With the exception of a few commercial ventures<sup>10</sup>, the majority of recordings circulate within academic and archival institutions. The value of a recording is questioned when the recording is mass-produced and sold commercially. Still, the fact remains that even the most commercial of performance recordings have educational value. The Royal Shakespeare Company may profit from their mass distributed performance recordings, but the quality of these performances is in no way diminished by their mass distribution. The most commercial recorded theatre tends to be stage plays adapted for the screen. These are not documents, but new products based upon a theatrical foundation. When attending a film based upon a stage play or novel, no one would critique the product using a canon based upon literary or dramatic theory. Commercial performance documents are available, but in the course of critiquing these documents great care must be taken not to compare and contrast these works with dramatic pieces adapted for the screen. Documentation is not adaptation.

Individuals creating recorded performance undertake a task of preservation, rather than commercialisation. Nonetheless, practitioners who document live performance, and those involved in the creation of the original live performance, must bear a certain 'audience' in mind while creating recorded performances. The document intended to capture all, captures nothing. As Gay McAuley (1994) states, '...two functions cannot necessarily be served by the same recordings' (p.188). The same video can serve (or fail to serve) a multitude of purposes, but in the creation and distribution of these documents it is imperative that practitioners have an intention when capturing a performance. The process of creating a recording destined for the

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<sup>10</sup> The Royal Shakespeare Company, for example, sells a number of recordings and adaptations from its website. (The Royal Shakespeare Company 2007).

interactive CD-Rom should be different than the process of recording a performance destined for a company's private records. If the reasons for documenting are not determined, it would be best to make multiple recordings which could later be accessed depending upon a viewer's needs. In all cases, a description as simple as a director's note in a program could make all the difference to an archivist or scholar, and provide the gentlest of directions to the casual viewer. McAuley (1994) encourages that the recorder go one step further '...to explain in an up-front way what principles governed the recording format, choice of camera position, movement or lack of it, etc' (p.192). While recorded performance still seek legitimacy as documents, traditional written supplements will contribute to more informed usage of audiovisual recordings.

Archival storage and usage of recorded performance is one of the most prolific in the debate regarding the use of documented performance. Regardless of issues involving the practice and process of documentation, recording for the sake of archiving and preservation appears to be the one category in which critics and champions meet on common ground.

We are the first generation that has been offered the technical possibility of recording theatrical performance...There is a responsibility on us and on the theatre artists of this generation to think about this potentiality, and to think about the record we can leave for the pleasure and edification of the next generation (McAuley 1994, p.186).

McAuley (1994) goes on to state that it may not even be a matter of capability, but of a responsibility to future generations that will not have the opportunity to study a given performance without the creation of archives (p.186). She also recognises the educational function archives could potentially serve for present generations and states that the subject of her article is

...the use of video for documentation of theatrical performance, with the urgent need for local and national action to set up proper video archives, and with the nature of the recordings that can best meet requirements of such archives. Even though the lived reality of theatrical event always escapes the recording medium, it is none the less true that video has much to offer in the domain of archival recording (p.183).

Practitioners and scholars may back away at the thought of theatrical experience moved to the private living room, but ultimately a need to document, to keep a record wins out over preservation of the moment. Ultimately, the archive is the compromise of the recorded performance debate. The once evil, stolen, misrepresentation of theatrical performance is suddenly transformed into a needed, adequate record upon its placement in the archive.

However, this placement in the archive is not merely a matter of shoot and store. McAuley (1994) expresses that inherent complications exist in moving the fleeting moment to the permanent past (p.184-5). In order to ease this transition she suggests '...active involvement by the archivists, or those commissioned by them, during the creative event...' (p.185). Thus, McAuley (1994) hopes to see the creation of the document become as much a collaborative process as those which give rise to live performances. Marco de Marinis (1985) believes such a process should be implemented on every occasion of a performance document's creation. In evaluating the usefulness of recorded documents Marinis (1985) states that recorded documents' strength lies in their capacity to

be produced by those same people who will use them... or at least may be produced in consultation with and according to directions given by them (p.388).

When the recorded document is finally acknowledged as being whole unto itself, with a potential for process unique to its form, then the documents themselves will

improve in quality. In order to truly improve recorded performance documents, the process of recording must involve input from those who stand to benefit from the creation of the documents.

Annabelle Melzer (1995b) also states that increased involvement from individuals outside of the theatrical profession would improve the quality of recorded performance. In conjunction with this involvement she advocates the increased circulation of existing performance recordings. 'Tapes are so immobilised in archives, theatre storerooms, and private collections that too little of the material has been seen by too few people' (p.275). This lack of visibility has not only caused existing documents to see under use, but has impeded the development of subsequent recordings. As such, Melzer (1995a) extends her statement to propose that existing recordings serve as training materials for those wishing to create additional documents. In order for this increased access to occur, recorded performances must find their way out of the archival closet.

The archive alone is not sufficient if recorded documents are to be used to their full educational potential. The lack of circulation renders the archived document applicable to more specific analysis, while educational recordings are meant to see mass distribution that will encourage a greater level of dialogue.

...[H]ow else can one teach theatre to a community of students who, for all their eagerness and commitment, have never really seen theatre? (Melzer 1995a, p.149).

Removal from the archive also places an additional burden upon a recording. In Marinis' (1985) view the creator of educational material carries the additional responsibility '...to work in montage, that it is to *tell about* the training and not merely record it' (p.387). Generally, the same materials available to a live audience (a

program, director's notes) should be sufficient in supplementing the audiovisual of a performance recording. Of course, some recordings are intended to examine behind the scenes, providing information about preparation and rehearsal. These documents are often part of a series or collection, and contain interviews with directors, designers, and actors. Again, a statement of intention would clarify what supplementary footage or documents are necessary to produce an edifying document. Without increased circulation, there will be no means of determining what supplements are lacking.

Marinis' (1985) recorded performance is a finished product to be referenced in consideration with other recorded materials. The opinion here is that the recorded performance cannot and should not be accessible when separated from its accompanying materials. Marinis (1985) fails to recognise the educational value inherent in the recorded performance alone. Even the worst of recordings provides sound and visuals where none would be available to illuminate dramatic texts. The recorded performance does not have to be fleshed out to serve a tutorial purpose; in the process of creating a new audience, and new evidence the document has already accomplished a task of great value. Nonetheless, it is necessary to provide these materials in order to offer a complete documentary, rather than a limited (albeit audiovisual) account of sound and image.

Marvin Carlson and Patrice Pavis '...repeatedly claim the word "notation" would not raise the expectation that one intended to "replicate"' (Melzer 1995b, p.259). Describing recorded performances as notations speak to intention in creation, while the division between preservation and interpretation provides further insight



into a document's capacity to serve a specific function.<sup>11</sup> By simply implementing these terms in conjunction with the three given categories the creators of a performance document would be able to convey a great deal about a given recording with minimal management of the viewer. 'This document has been created for archival research, with the intention of preserving this performance.' Or, 'This recording is intended for educational use in hopes that it gives rise to discussion focused upon interpretation.' Even the clearest, most definitive and convincing of statements will not dictate usage.

Documents, then, do not exist naturally but are always produced by someone, and almost never for the purpose to which someone else-historian or student will later put them (Marinis 1985, p.388).

These statements of intention would not exist to limit access or usage, but to improve the processes of recording. If the eventual usage is known, the recording can be tailored to such a function without compromising the recording for other viewers. Various methods for recording a performance exist, and a statement of intention allows the best method to be chosen given the financial capabilities of the funding organization, and the needs of a performance. Once the film has left the camera, the resulting document's usage should not be limited. For those viewers who access a recording for a purpose other than that stated, a statement of intention serves as an explanation for choices made in the course of preserving a production.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Carlson's (1981) and Pavis' (1982) hopes of clarifying intention will be examined more closely in subsequent chapters.

<sup>12</sup> For example, statements at the beginning of V&A recorded performances alert a viewer to the fact that a recording was created for the V&A archives. As such, a viewer will be aware that the practitioners were limited by V&A regulations which dictate acceptable methods of recording. See Chapter 6.

## Examining Function

'...is there any guarantee at all as to how the performance document will be used? The theatre critic and scholar Jan Kott is concerned that the tape, once made, may assume a life of its own, a life not as the performance "document" it was intended to be...' (Melzer 1995b, p.260).

Misinterpretation and misuse are possibilities when a recording leaves the hands of those who created for the eyes and ears of those who view and study. This transfer of ownership endows the viewer with a power of manipulation, a complete power that is unique to the user of the recorded performance. The recording's capacity for alteration is not a negative attribute, but an aspect which makes a recorded performance a useful document. A recording's interpretation should in no way be limited, but statements of intention will allow a viewer to analyse a performance with a better of understanding of choices made regarding the performance, compared to choices made regarding the recording. An audience member has the capacity to twist meanings and interpret outside of practitioners' intentions, but the owner, the viewer of the recording, can go so far as to fast forward, rewind, pause, (actions Melzer 1995b, believes are 'important for study and analysis', p.268). While these abilities certainly simplify the process of re-viewing McAuley (1994) warns that

{o]ne needs to resist the temptation to make another work of art out of the theatrical performance-to be careful that one is not reducing the theatrical reality to the status of raw material from which a new video is working (p.192).

This potential for abuse remains in spite of declaring intention, deliberately naming, and extensive debate. No action can be taken to prevent the recorded document's audience from interpreting a recording in a manner that would be displeasing to those involved in the creation of recording, or its original, live performance. Ultimately, the

documents must be released with a hope for the best and a trust of the unknown spectator.

Were one to examine the individuals making use of these recorded performances, she would quickly come to the conclusion that this trust is well deserved. A 1988-89 survey of Lincoln Center's Film on Video and Tape Archive revealed that of 2, 510 patrons 1, 497 were theatre professionals, with actors accounting for over fifty percent of total usage (McAuley 1994, p.194). The individuals accessing these documents are not doing so in order to replace a theatrical experience or to avoid a live encounter within a specific playing space. The majority of these feared, potential manipulators are seeking to improve the theatrical form through study and exposure. The materials they are accessing are not copies of the performance which is presently struggling to pay its technicians, but evidence of performances that have would otherwise exist only in memory. Each document represents a new opportunity and exists as one example of '...a revolution in teaching methods and research...which also provide(s) a fertile locus for discussions in the theory of art' (Melzer 195a, p.150).

Still, the release of these documents does not guarantee that only professionals or well meaning students will gain access to recordings. However, many practitioners and theatres have taken action to control access to recorded performances. Denise Varney and Rachel Fensham (2000) advocate increased availability of recordings and criticise theatres that '...deny public access to video documentation of live performance...' (p.91). Questions of access are rooted in questions of ownership which remain largely unresolved. Theatre companies, the actors they employ, the directors who produce, and the designers who find their works documented could all reasonably stake a claim in ownership of a recording resulting from their work.

If the actors' performances are being "misread", judged in terms of the recording medium when they were designed for the stage; it may make actors very uneasy about giving permission to people to make recordings, and restrictive about who can have access to those that have been made. (McAuley 1994, p.192)

At the same time, an archive or institution that acquires a performance document can claim equal ownership. The resulting complication is that a multitude of individuals and groups can all claim control over a single recording. The ways this control could be manifested range from restricted access to the right to distribute or destroy (Melzer 1995a, p.155). The resolution of ownership issues will not be absolute; these questions must be answered for every individual recording. As no two performances are the same, the avenues for determining ownership of the resulting document cannot be resolved with a single, broad stroke. Individuals, theatres and archives must establish procedures based upon criteria specific to each production.

Issues of legality aside, the fact remains that there are no means of policing the usage of performance recordings. Whether an actor or archive limits access, or archives collect data about the educational level of those accessing recorded performances, a certain amount of misinterpretation will be inherent. After all, the recordings are evidence; they provide partial records from which a myriad of conclusions will be drawn. Solace for the dubious lies in the fact that the majority of these documents seem to be used for a variety of educational purposes over and over again. The individuals seeking out these documents already have an interest in the theatre, and these recordings only supplement their knowledge in the same manner as a dramatic script or interview with a director. Performance documents are truly educational materials, and they should be created, circulated, and analysed like any other document.

Without that inclusion, performance may remain sacred, but it will also become increasingly absent from critical theory. As we move into the digital matrix of documentation and analysis, performance cannot remain in a reactionary metaphysics of presence (Varney and Fensham 2000, p.96).

A willingness to circulate will increase the number of available documents; this potential for comparison will immediately elevate the form, but with this influx of additional material the need for standards in approach becomes paramount.

### **Canned Peas**

Francois Luxereau, Director of the video department at CNRS, compared recorded performance to canned peas.

"Peas in a can, they have nothing to do with fresh peas, and still, one is often compelled to eat canned peas, all the time knowing that these have only the vaguest connection to fresh peas" (1981 cited Melzer 1995a, p.156).

While it could be added to the collection of derogatory terms used towards the documents, it also conveys the nature of these recordings as perfectly adequate and good for you, but not necessarily tasty or purposely sought. In order to improve the quality of recorded performance the presence and importance of these documents must be recognised in order to legitimise the form. Performances will continue to be recorded, as peas will continue to be canned. In order to improve the quality of what is available a new recipe must be established which takes the needs of viewers and practitioners into account. The recipe will have to work with the available ingredients; canned peas are going to taste like canned peas and recordings are never going to be live performances. Arguing about inferiority or brand names will do nothing to change the basic ingredients. Fretting as to whether peas will find their way into canned soup casseroles or recorded performances will be judged as the best theatre has to offer will do nothing to prevent their manufacture. Recorded

performances are the best available evidence of certain performances and no amount of verbiage will change this fact. Peas are sometimes out of season and performances are sometimes inaccessible. Cans and videos have provided the only solution thus far.

### **Canning the Trinity: Liveness, Memory, Ritual and Recorded Performance**

Recorded performances are being unjustly criticised not on the content of their footage, but on the basis of their formatting. Criticism of these recordings frequently cites, liveness, memory, and ritual as reasons not to record live performance.

Documents rather than adaptations, they cannot be classified as theatre or television, drama or film. For some, these recordings are a step too far, a record that appears complete in spite of all of its losses, an experience that cannot be simulated, but *is* in its playback; an attempt at replacing memory rather than enhancing it, a subversion of community and ritual in favour of solitude. There is no denying that liveness, the process of memory, and ritual are lost in the process of recording and distributing live performance, but are these losses justification for questioning this process of preservation? Are these losses so great that the resulting documents reflect nothing of contemporary and past theatrical arts? In the course of this chapter, I will explore theatre's trinity of liveness, memory, and ritual, and the transference of each to an audiovisual format.

#### **Liveness**

"The idea that theatre's "liveness" is-in-itself- a virtue, a source of automatic, unearned moral superiority to film and television, is sheer bourgeois sentimentality"(Roger Copeland 1990 Cited Varney and Fensham 2000, p.91).

Whether Shakespearean or Brechtian, medieval or renaissance, revival or revolutionary, theatre is live. Even in those cases when the performance itself is not entirely present,<sup>13</sup> an audience is usually physically present when one speaks of

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<sup>13</sup> Here, I reference performances which are becoming increasingly dependent upon virtual reality, and like technologies, in simulating physical presence onstage.

theatrical performance. This opportunity for contact, the moment of encounter, cannot be replicated for the viewer of the recording. Her interaction is a different type of input/output, the input of the DVD and the output of digitised imagery. A mechanical action met with a mechanical reaction. This is not the stuff theories of audience are made of. 'It is the reciprocal nature of production and reception which characterises the formation and reformation of cultural markers for theatre' (Bennett 1997, p.165). The at-home spectator is not reciprocating, but taking without giving. This type of spectatorship is not theatrical, but mediatised, and the viewing is characterised by its passivity rather than its activity.

Still, the fear is not that an individual will see and hear the theatrical outside of the auditorium, but that he will believe this experience to be an adequate replacement for venturing to the black box or dress circle. The concern lies in the approach to the recording, and with good reason given that:

The position of the television viewer relative to the image on the screen was often compared with that of a boxing fan sitting ringside or a theatre-goer with the best seat in the house. Television "makes all the world a stage and every home a front row seat for sports, drama and news" (Orrin E. Dunlap 1947 Cited Auslander 1999, p.16)

In spite of technological capability, it seems unlikely that live performance could (or would) be reduced to mere transmission. The recorded performance has not changed the nature of theatre's presence, but provided another means of remembrance. Still, this non-corporal means of evocation is complicated as '[i]n the theatre the issue of remains as material documents becomes complicated –necessarily imbricated, schismatically, with the live body' (Schneider 2001, p.100). The complication of recorded performance in relation to liveness arises from the document's elimination of the physical, and de-emphasis of the body. In the course of altering the



documentation of live performance, recorded performances are misunderstood as objects that undermine the essence of theatre. What translates from stage to VHS is not the experience of an audience member, but the works, practices, sights and sounds of practitioners. Liveness is an aspect of theatrical performance, but there are insights to be gained from the languages spoken and the movements chosen- elements which are conveyed in both live and recorded formats.

Even under the best of circumstances, when the recording's viewer comprehends the limitations of transference, even when the document is true to original intent, hesitancy remains.

...there remains a strong tendency in performance theory to place live performance and mediatized or technological forms in direct opposition to one another. The terms of this opposition focus around two primary issues: *reproduction and distribution* (Auslander 1999, p.41).

Regardless of intent or use, the fact remains that some purists do not believe that a unique, one-time performance should be captured and multiplied for any purpose. The process of recording and distributing places a live performance in the grasp of a televisual medium, a medium which can only produce flawed translation. The nature of recorded performance is unacceptable because no real standards exist for judgment. A recording can be made, but how does one evaluate its worth? Without clear standards for what a recording should be striving to achieve, the document is destined for failure time and time again.<sup>14</sup>

Although the anxiety of critics who champion live performance is understandable, theorizations that privilege liveness as a pristine state uncontaminated by mediatization misconstrue the relation between the two terms (Auslander 1999, p.53).

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<sup>14</sup> See Chapter 4 for a more detailed consideration of the importance of establishing standards for the analysis of recorded performance documents.

Mediatisation is not the rival of Liveness, but a means of communication which sometimes incorporates live events. The audiovisual and the live do not present an either/or choice, necessitating that one choose between the two. The existence of audiovisual materials does not require the disappearance of live events. While Liveness describes the nature of performance, mediatisation describes one of many processes which an event can undergo after its presentation.

In order for the fields of theatre and performance studies to maintain equal footing with other academic disciplines, prejudices must be put aside. Technological advancements have altered the methods of studies not in only scientific fields, but in the Arts and Humanities as well. Recorded performance documents are a part of changing academic traditions, which now include digital records, audiovisual interviews, and internet accessible works. The failure to preserve recorded performances as valuable materials will leave Theatre and Performance Studies material poor as other disciplines adapt their focus to reflect the availability of new materials.

It is not realistic to propose that live performance can remain ontologically pristine or that it operates in a cultural economy separate from that of the mass media (Auslander 1999, p.40).

Liveness cannot be preserved outside of an original space and moment. Yet, it would seem that if a performance's physical presence were its defining characteristic, the content of a performance would be vastly unimportant. The theatrical art form has more to offer than bodies on a stage being acknowledged by bodies in seats. Rebecca Schneider (2001) demands repeat performance in a variety of formats stating,

...performance becomes itself through messy and eruptive reappearance, challenging, via the performative trace, any neat antimony between appearance and disappearance, or presence and absence- the ritual repetitions that mark performance as simultaneously indiscreet, non-original, relentless citational, and remaining (p.103).

Through evidence and discussion, documentation and access, the live event refuses to disappear entirely.

### **Privileging Memory: or the Effects of Disappearance**

'Performance honors the idea that a limited number of people in a specific time/space frame can have an experience of value which leaves no visible trace afterwards' (Phelan 1993, p.148).

It is not the absence of bodies in seats, but the subversion of disappearance that concerns Peggy Phelan. Without bodies there can be no memories, memories which she believes are the most appropriate storage for performances past. Rachel Varney and Denise Fensham (2000) state that individual memory has long been considered '...the legitimate and dynamic record of the performance' (p.90). Still, this assignment of performance to memory was born of necessity; there were formerly no alternative methods for the preservation of a production. With technological advancements it would seem foolish to continue to prize memory as the '...only fit place for performance to be stored' (Varney and Fensham 2000, p.91). In spite of a recording's shortcomings, even the most amateur of documents could serve as an adept visual aid or auditory prompt. However, Phelan's (1993) concern is not a document's perceived success or failure, but its eradication of '...active vanishing, a deliberate and conscious refusal to take the payoff of visibility' (p.19). By this definition, recorded performance certainly deals a blow to traditional theatrical experience.

While Phelan (1993) recognises the recordings' potential to change the nature of live performance, Philip Auslander (1999) chooses to redefine this act of vanishing; it is his opinion that recorded performance remains true to form as audiovisual material is also in a continual process of disappearance.

Both live performance and the performance of mediatization are predicated on disappearance: the televisual image is produced by an ongoing process in which scan lines replace one another, and it is always as absent as it is present; the use of recordings causes them to degenerate. In a very literal, material sense televisual and other technical reproductions, like live performances, become themselves through disappearance. (Auslander 1999, p.45)

In spite of Auslander's (1999) best efforts, it seems a bit of a stretch to compare Phelan's (1993) disappearing performances to scan lines. Recordings diminish the quality of active vanishing, but redeem themselves in serving as an aid to memory. Auslander's (1999) televisual disappearance cannot compare to Phelan's temporal moment. The value of a recording does not lie in its ability to replicate the live event, but in its ability to preserve aspects of a performance that would otherwise be lost.

While memory is a valid means of approaching performance, it is simply irresponsible to neglect available materials if one is attempting to create a fair and complete analysis of any facet of a production. Phelan (1993) states that

[p]erformance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations; once it does so, it becomes something other than performance (p.146).

Recorded performances do not exist as performances unto themselves; an original event must occur in order for evidence to come into existence. As evidence, recorded performances can prove invaluable.

To claim the recording as evidence immediately leads to questions as to whether or not a recording actually exists as an 'objective' account of a performance (Melzer 1995b, p.262). The recording itself exists as one resulting document; a document that makes relevant fields of study more objective in its accessibility. Paul Ricoeur (1999) believes

[m]emory constitutes a knowledge of past events, or the pastness of past events. In that sense it is committed to the truth, even if it is not a truthful relationship to the past; that is, precisely because it has a truth-claim, memory can be accused of being unfaithful to this claim (p.5).

There can be no objective record of performance, in memory, in document, in archive, or in the moment. Documents and memory serve only to complement one another, and no additional check on the memory should be shunned or belittled. This separation is a condition of

...ways of thinking of lineage and tradition would certainly insist on keeping the various circuits of memory and transmission separate – to each their own (Taylor 2003, p.195).

In order to assemble a best possible account of a performance past, it is necessary to integrate these circuits and employ all possible methods in the documentation of live performance.

Once the recording has been defined as document rather than performance Phelan (1993) describes its function stating, '[t]he document of a performance then is only to spur a memory, an encouragement of memory to become present' (p.146). This particular function of the document is of extreme importance. In fact, it would seem that such a purpose recognises the primacy of memory, and serves memory's mandate as sacred storage; it would seem that recordings were meant to aid rather than supplant memory as the ark of the theatrical covenant.

The checks and balances of memory and audiovisual evidence constitute a new dynamic, one in which a recording's seeming accuracy does not aid the memory, but supplants it as an appropriate means of recalling an event.

In terms of the relationship between photography and memory Roland Barthes has contributed to the notion that by capturing an image on celluloid the memory of the past becomes less accessible rather than more. The "evidence" of the photography undermines the subjective nature of the memory which colours memories with a favourable glow, revealing the realm of the memory to be corrupt and unreliable (Gorman 2000, p.97).

To default to use of a recording, prizing its questionable objectivity over the subjective of memory, does not advance theatrical study. The substitution of one form of recall and account for another is not an improvement, but a change. Memory recall and documentary viewing both have merits. In varying circumstances, one will prove more appropriate than another. While memory may not be the best means of preserving specific blocking and lighting choices, video documentation would be a poor choice for the preservation of audience response or actor/spectator dynamic. Memory recall is a vital aspect of the ritual of theatre going, which cannot be supplanted by any amount of technological advancement. A recording device cannot have an experience, and as such, memory will continue to play a vital role in the study of theatrical performance.

### **Ritual**

'Even to say it in one word, ritual, is asking for trouble. Ritual has been so variously defined- as concept, praxis, process, ideology, yearning, experience, function- that it means very little because it means too much' (Schechner 1993, p.228).

If recordings are defined as documents rather than performances they need not be criticised for subverting ritual experience. While a recorded performance overlooks, devalues, or undermines ritual, a recorded performance *document* is as

imperative to study as an anthropologist's stills. The process of documentation does not disperse the community that has gathered, but creates a record of the event for which they have congregated.

My point is simply that community is not a function of liveness. The sense of community arises from being part of an audience, and the quality of that experience of community derives from the specific audience situation, not from the spectacle for which that audience has gathered (Auslander 1999, p.56).

The individuals involved in the recording process contribute to the ritual experience. Although their contribution may not be conventional, they provide insight and information for those who have no means of attending an event. These individuals act as the representative for all those who will sigh, 'if only...', the resulting document serves as a transcript.

The transcript of a performance exists in a televisual language- a language that has become the standard of Western culture. Media is not a context for experience; it is *the* context for experience. The concern in translating live experience to an audiovisual format is not that a performance will not read, but that it *cannot* be read. A spectator well versed in the languages of film and television may not be able to comprehend theatrical performance recordings as documents rather than television drama onstage. However, these concerns over potential miscomprehension are not exclusive to the theatrical recording.

The ambiguity of theatre since 1960 regarding whether or not an event is "really happening" is the outcome of the blurring of the boundaries between the categories of performance. Television has made it possible to theatricalize experience by editing even the most intimate or horrendous events into "news" so that people feel nothing strange about a complementary actualization of art... (Schechner 1988, p.194).

Media's dominance over traditional live art forms has transcended matters of preference, as audiovisual forms have altered audiences' approach to live performance. As Philip Auslander establishes that the very concept of 'liveness' has changed with increased media access to worldwide events, Richard Schechner (1988) believes that increased access to technological equipment has changed the theatre spectator himself.

The movie camera has given artists the ability to stop action, examine gesture frame by frame, go forward and backward, repeat, and study compositions as they condense and evaporate; these techniques have reshaped theatrical imagination (p.240).

Not only has this increased access changed theatrical imagination; it has changed the very process of spectating. With or without recorded performance, the live audience exists as media's audience momentarily displaced. Schechner (1988) describes a scene in which:

...[s]pectators come and go, pay attention or don't, select what parts of the performance to follow. These habits may be further trained by television—because the ubiquitous sets are always turned on but often not looked at; or the radio and phonograph which also encourage selective inattention (p. 234).

This 'selective inattention' is another by-product of the constant media viewers turned occasional live audiences. His description is striking similar to Sean Cubitt's description of the television spectator:

"TV's presence to the viewer is subject to constant flux: it is only intermittently "present," as a kind of writing on the glass...caught in the dialectic of constant becoming and constant fading" (1991 Cited Auslander 1999, p.43).

Schechner (1988) does not chastise, nor does he demand his audience's undivided attention, he recognises that the theatrical experience, the give and take, is not what is



use to be. If this is the case, the camera may operate as the most attentive spectator in the house. Meanwhile, the live audience can be found at the bar, in the restroom or on a smoke break.

While eyes momentarily close and minds wander, Schechner (1988) presents a case for the extension of ritual. Perhaps the precise moments in the specific space are not of utmost importance, but are only moments in a series of moments which comprise a ritual experience.

Ritual studies are turning from looking at the "finished product" toward examining the "whole performance sequence": training, workshop, rehearsal, warm-up, performance, cool down, and aftermath (Schechner 1988, p.323-4).

If ritual studies take into account the aftermath of a performance, it is here that theatrical recordings will find their niche in performance studies. A recorded performance document can be best classified as the result, the evidence of a performance.

'Aftermath can be a slow unfolding process involving how performances are evaluated, how the experience of performing is being used by the community' (Schechner and Appel 1990, p.5). If recorded performances are an element of performance aftermath, then a performance is most likely being used by a community for archival or educational purposes. These are the tried and true means through which recorded performance documents are met with the greatest understanding and respect.

The choice to use (or not use) a recording in a specific manner speaks volumes about the context in which a live performance exists. To understand these contexts is to improve one's comprehension of community, historical, and social factors which act upon a production

The ways people cool off and the sometimes extended aftermath of performances are less studied but very important...the aftermath includes spreading the news about performances, evaluating them-even writing about them- and in many ways determining how specific performances feed into ongoing systems of social and aesthetic life (Schechner 1988, p.xiv).

The moment of performance is deceptive in its brevity. The preparation for a performance and the effects of a performance far out last the evening spent on either side of the proscenium. As performance studies delve into the process of presentation, the function and worth of resulting documents becomes increasingly clear. Recorded performance documents do not exist to devalue or undermine an original performance, but exist as evidence, one document amongst many which can contribute to those dialogues as part of the aftermath.

Richard Schechner (1988) states, 'Art is cooked and life is raw' (p.38). In keeping with this analogy, I would like to propose that recorded performances are reheated. While certainly rehearsed and presented, they are merely reminders of the main event that preceded documentary creation. Yes, this would make recorded performances leftovers, but documentation is the ultimate act of *'waste not want not.'* Recorded performance documents are not the result of media's intrusion on sacred theatrical spaces, but the most recent attempt to preserve aspects of performances for later study or enjoyment. Like any document, they exist as incomplete records which must be consulted in conjunction with other materials and accounts. While they cannot replicate a sense of 'liveness', they can document the occurrences of a live performance. The recordings obviously function outside of a tradition of memory/recall in theatrical studies, but as educational and archival materials become increasingly digitised, establishing a canon for these documents is increasingly important. These documents are prime examples of the aftermath which Schechner

(1988) references, an aftermath which is not separate from, but part of the rituals surrounding theatrical performance.

### **Building a Memory or Canned for Emergency Use**

“‘Archival’ memory exists as documents, maps, literary texts, letters, archaeological remains, bones, videos, films, CDs, all those items supposedly resistant to change’ (Taylor 2003, p.19).

On two occasions prior to my visit to the V&A’s Theatre Museum Collection at Blythe House I have felt as though I were in a prison. On these prior occasions I *was* in a prison. So when I compare two days of archival research to the day I shadowed my father on his business call to the local jail, and the field trip my junior girl scout troop took five years later to the same jail following its remodel, I am not speculating about the architecture, security measures, and ambience of prison, I am stating that no place has more reminded me of The Amherst County Jail in Amherst, Virginia than The Theatre Museum’s Collection Centre in London, England.

Upon arrival at the infamous Blythe House turnstile I was certain I was lost. This compound of pavement, gates and CCTV (completely devoid of people) could not be the archive I had booked a place into six weeks prior; there were no signs, there were no windows, there were no people. I pressed the buzzer hesitantly (I had no intention of accidentally happening upon a secret government agency and finding myself under interrogation for the next 12 hours, I had tickets to see *Equus* that night.) ‘Yes?’ said a distant voice. ‘I have an appointment for the reading room,’ I replied. ‘What’s your name?’ ‘MaryAnn Jones’ ‘What?’ ‘Jones. MaryAnn Jones.’ ‘Come through the turnstile, go directly to the stairs on the side of the building and stop at reception.’ I struggled with the turnstile, managed to force my way through and walked towards the staircase. I stopped at reception and produced my student ID, bankcard, and Virginia State Driver’s License. Having satisfied their worry that I was about to run through the building speaking above a whisper and then stuff video recordings into my bag I was given a swipe card.

From the outdoor turnstile to the indoor turnstile. Swipe. From the internal turnstile to a blood red door. Swipe. Following the directions down a hall to a second internal door (not blood red) Swipe. One final hallway, a right and I arrive at the protected reading room. I am met by a rather disorganised staff member who can't seem to find my name on today's approved list but then remembers, 'Oh, you're here for the videos. Which one do you want first?' After depositing my earthly belongings and coat into a locker (only paper and pencils allowed inside the sacred space) I am ushered into a side room off of the reading room. This 'viewing lab' is home to five televisions with DVD and VHS players. The majority of the equipment could not have been updated since the mid 1980s.

I chose one of the ancient (by technological means) monstrosities in a corner, attempting to position myself away from the photocopier and office equipment that is stored in the viewing lab. The only windows in the room were small, ten feet off of the ground and protected with three-inch thick bars. My own special cellblock within the prison walls left me feeling a bit like a hamster. Nevertheless, I deposited Cheek by Jowl's *The Duchess of Malfi* into the ancient tape player, and it stuck. The tape was totally and completely trapped inside the electronic oddity. I hit eject, I panicked, I questioned my ability to operate a VHS player. Eventually, I mustered up enough courage to approach the dishevelled librarian and she came in to stare at the carnage. 'I don't use these much; I don't know that much about them.' She hits eject and then declares, 'We're not going to get it out.'

I sat down to collect my thoughts. I stared at the concrete walls and contemplated all the incarcerated performances that would never see the light of day or be sprung only to meet an untimely demise in outdated equipment. I must confess that I had my suspicions about the off site archive of the now defunct V&A Theatre

Museum. After a series of enquiries, I booked my place in the viewing room the recommended six weeks in advance. Only after this string of communication was completed was I given informed that I 'would not be able to consult any paper materials on this visit.' Which was fine with me since I hadn't requested to view any paper materials and had no intention of reading up on 1950s musical programs just for the fun of it, but I suppose it's better that they prepare me for this possible disappointment. The video recordings seemed to be unimportant, inconsequential when compared with the 'real materials' that the true professionals and academics poured over next door. The viewing lab doubled as spare office space and no one really seemed to know how the recordings came to the space or had been chosen for the honour of being immortalised in Blythe House.

The video collection's existence seemed accidental. I couldn't imagine that this environment, my own experience, the librarians' attitudes were what the practitioners had had in mind when they were in the recording process. Perhaps my own expectations were simply too high, but this was the NATIONAL archive. If recordings weren't taken seriously or treated with respect here where would they find respect? After all the talk of the rise of the archive, the archive and memory I couldn't help but feel that the 'Archive Fever' had subsided. The recordings were not treated as serious documents; home movies are better maintained and catalogued. The information provided about the recordings was incomplete at best, and the 'supplementary materials' were nowhere to be found.

Fifteen minutes later and 'the girl from upstairs' hadn't been sent down to look at the stuck tape. I walked over and hit eject in one final attempt; *The Duchess* begrudgingly came out of hiding. I snapped it up from the cantankerous artefact and popped into the newer, shinier, built within the past decade model. Sure, the fast

forward, rewind, and pause function didn't work properly, but at least I had images and audio. With my air traffic control headphones I was quite content for a quarter of an hour. I was alone in the viewing lab and this recording might never again see the light of day. My frantic note taking (again, no pause, no rewind) was interrupted by loud screaming; the librarian had moved out of the reading room into the viewing lab with her cell phone and was having a rather involved discussion about someone being locked out of her house. In the midst of her involved, lengthy, panicked discussion she had had enough foresight to move away from the 'real researchers' and carry on her conversation not five feet from my video player. I turned up the volume and readjusted my headphones to no avail. The traditional researchers may have been spared, but I was privileged to the entire conversation. Obviously, there was nothing of importance occurring in the viewing lab. I had been seated at the children's table of the V&A archive. I did my best to entertain myself with crayons and to chew with my mouth closed for the rest of the day. I returned the next day and by mid afternoon was joined by one other viewer who took no notes, carried no materials, but laughed heartily at her recording; it was uplifting. Another performance had reached the fluorescent light of day.

That afternoon I made my way to the now defunct V&A Theatre Museum. I signed in with security again and waited to meet Jill Evans, the Director of the Video collection. We travelled through the remaining artefact to a dark meeting room where we discussed the nature of recorded performance, the process of recording, and Ms. Evans' role (doing everything) in the process of recording and archiving. I asked her how she came to her position and she replied that she been made a documentary filmmaker for the BBC who was made redundant. She 'happened upon' her position, had no formal training, and described the process of creating the archive as one of

trial and error with 'quite a few mistakes' along the way. She talked about formatting and the choice to use SVHS (later deemed a mistake), the lack of funds to change VHS formatted documents into DVDs and the uncertain future of the collection given the Theatre Museum's closing. She explained the criteria for filming to me and discussed the upcoming ten thousand pound project to record *Equus*. She then asked me which videos I had watched over the last two days. I replied, 'The Duchess of Malfi, Light, the King Lear rehearsal, Shooting Shakespeare, and Our Country's Good.' 'Oh,' she said rather off-handedly, 'You didn't see any of the good ones.' My confusion was apparent. She clarified that 'the good ones' were the expensive recordings, the ones where sound mixing and professional recording was done on site. She popped in a promotional V&A video to explain further. '10 years in 5 Minutes' showed clips from the good ones, 11 videos of 300 that had cost 6,000 to 8,000 pounds apiece to record.

My interview with Ms. Evans explained a great deal about the Blythe House staff's attitudes towards recordings. These librarians were the caretakers of these materials by default; they were only in their current location because of the Theatre Museum's closure. Ms. Evans herself had obvious favourites of the collection; recordings she considered to be of a higher calibre, although the average archive user would have no means of distinguishing one of the 'good ones' from the other recording. Plans for future recordings continue while the fate of existing recordings is uncertain. The practice of recording appears to have taken precedence over the maintenance and circulation of recordings.

In looking back on my V&A visit I realise that I was both shocked and horrified. Every material I had read led me to believe that recordings could not be entrusted to the general public; that archives or educational institutions were the only



places with the staff and resources to utilise performance recordings properly. My own experience left me feeling the recordings would have been better off anywhere *besides* Blythe House. The recordings seemed to be undervalued, underappreciated, underused, and misunderstood. Why even go through the trouble if the format will soon be outdated, the equipment itself is inoperable, and access is guarded at best. The general public is being forced to make appointments and justify their presence only to be met by apathetic caretakers, pointed towards malfunctioning electronic antiques, and given recordings with no supplementary information. Access to the archive was guarded, but the documents themselves command little respect. Even 'the good ones' are mixed in amongst their plainer counterparts, in no way distinguished in spite of the additional resources that were utilised in their production.

Blythe House is safe hiding for recorded performances that are not meant to be seen or heard. Concerns over misrepresentation and recordings as replacement performances are quickly laid to rest when one explores these performances' electronic traces. Not only is this national archive a depressing reminder about the state of the failed Theatre Museum; it is a commentary on the state of theatre studies, funding, and the use of technology in performance preservation. The importance of documentation has been recognised; however, the possibilities (dare I suggest, solutions) the recordings could provide are being completely ignored. One would only venture to this site if she *had* to (and indeed, must prove necessity in order to gain access). These videos are truly for emergency use only; sadly, the storage facility itself is in a state of emergency. In the midst of decline, relevant, complete records are being shuffled to the side as panic gives way to ignorance. The blackout has occurred, the state of emergency has been declared- this is the time for which canned peas were

manufactured. The cans are there to be opened, but no one seems to know how to operate the can opener. No one even seems to know what a can opener looks like.

### **Future, Past...And Present?**

Months later, I realise that my visit to the archive was doomed before I even booked my spot in the viewing lab. An archive of recorded performances does not exist for my benefit; it exists for the benefit of those who will come after me, those precious future beings for whom these recordings have been buried deep and covered over. I attempted to open the time capsule when the contents were still contemporary. The value and relevance of the recordings has yet to be determined; for now, we must simply shoot and store. The Blythe House recordings do not exist for the modern researcher's emergencies; these documents are to be saved for some far greater emergency of the future. To use precious resources at this junction would just be irresponsible. Diana Taylor (2003) states that,

[a]rchival memory works across distance, over time and space...What changes over time is the value, relevance, or meaning of the archive, how the items it contains get interpreted, even embodied (p.19).

Perhaps archival memory does not work without the passage of time, the travelling of a distance, the expansion of space. Perhaps Archival memory is of no significance where individual memory is intact. Archival objects, like antiques, increase in value with the passage of time. In the course of this chapter, I examine a traditional concept of the archive, considering the archive as a bureaucratic institution, one which exists for purposes of preservation, to the exclusion of easy access and usage.

The archive is the legacy of the past, the inheritance of the future; the present is irrelevant. The archival institution - the processes and bureaucracy surrounding

'archiving' - give a society permission to procrastinate, to value and analyse at some undetermined future date. While

[t]he archive is habitual to western culture. We understand ourselves relative to the remains we accumulate, the tracks we house, mark, and cite, the material traces we acknowledge (Schneider 2001, p.100);

We have no concept, only an impression, a series of impressions associated with a word... We only have an impression, an insistent impression through the unstable feeling of shifting figure, of a schema, or of an in-finite or indefinite process (Derrida 1996, p.29).

Thus, the archive is a given, a constant, but simultaneously undefined and vague in its status. There can be no standard course of action when approaching the archive, as the archive exists without clear definition. The researcher or student has no hope of determining what can or cannot be accomplished within a given archive, when a clear definition of purpose and functions continues to allude after 2000 years. De Certeau characterises 'the archive as a place that is produced by an identifiable group sharing a specific practice for organizing the materials' (Robialksa 2002, p.6). Organisation as a primary task leaves the materials ready for access, but fails to consider those moments beyond the shelving and storage, the moments at which the documents must be taken down and put to use. The preservation of documents does not guarantee the preservation of the archive.

The concept of the archive shelters itself, of course, this memory of the name *arkhe*. But it also shelters itself from this memory which it shelters; which it comes down to saying that it also forgets (Derrida 1996, p.2).

The process of archiving materials grants one the permission to forget. Placement in the archive can remove a burden of remembrance, but this burden is a necessary one. Rebecca Schneider (2001) believes that memory and 'body to body transmission' are

less prized than the archive (p.101). Just as memory cannot be defined as the sole means of preserving performances past,<sup>15</sup> neither should the archive be valued over memory.

Once the archive trivializes memory, it damages the dialogue of remembrance in which it takes part. If we consider performance as “of” disappearance, if we think of ephemerality as “vanishing”, and if we think of performance as the antithesis of “saving”, do we limit ourselves to an understanding of performance predetermined by a cultural habituation to the patrilineal, West-identified (arguably white-cultural) logic of the Archive? (Schneider 2001, p.100).

While perseverance is admirable, no one seems to have noticed that we continue to pass on an archive in crisis. An archive that forgets does nothing for the processes of preservation, nor does it enhance those intellectual legacies that are meant to survive. That which is left in the archive cannot be forgotten. That moment has been documented, but individual memory serves an entirely separate function. The existence of an archive is not permission to forget.

The duality of memory vs. archive is not the only complication of archiving performance, Diana Taylor (2003) reminds her reader that ‘[a]nother myth is that the archive resists change, corruptibility, and political manipulation’ (p.19). The archive’s existence as an established institution does not guarantee that the process of archiving is without biases. Ownership, funding, and government initiatives can all affect the process of *what is* and *what is not* archived.

The curatorial responsibility towards presentation, conservation and restoration belies the myth of the stability of the artefact. Nowhere is this more the case than in performance studies, which grapples to find appropriate styles in which to catalogue and shelve its ghosts (Iball 2002, p.59).

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<sup>15</sup> See Chapter 2 discussion of memory as a major point of contention in the debate over the process of recording live performance.

While broad concerns regarding the stability and validity of the archive are certainly relevant to the processes of preserving performance, Helen Iball (2002) reminds that the preservation of performance is a constant struggle, that no means of documenting performance is yet perfect. Taylor (2003) goes on to examine other flaws of the archive stating,

...an archival, document-producing system that in the Americas serves the interests of the powerful, cannot encompass or “understand” pleas from the poor (p.204).

In the context of performance preservation, this could lead to a failure to include performances whose audience base is not of a specific socio-economic class. Jill Evans, Director of the Theatre Museum’s National Video Archive of Performance, discussed her frustration with the collection’s limited scope; all but one of the over three hundred performances are recordings of London-based productions (Jill Evans personal communication, 30 March 2007).

Rebecca Schneider (2001) adds to the list of cautions with a gentle reminder that ‘[t]he archive is built on “house arrest” – the solidification of value in ontology as retroactively secured in document, object, record’ (p.104). This house arrest allows nothing to change over time, in memory or in perception. Once again, the archived record becomes the ultimate form of preservation, to the exclusion of all other recollection. These documents will no longer exist as performances that can continue to influence through discourse and description, but will forever be consigned to their moment of preservation, evidence rather than affecting art. Still, what can one expect? ‘...[T]here is no archive fever without the threat of the death drive, this aggression and destruction drive’ (Derrida 1996, p.19). Perhaps, it is this fear of death making memory recall obsolete which causes the preference for institutionalization over individual memory recall. Aggression and destruction

manifest themselves through institutional action, turning remnants into documents, documents into property, and property into official records. This series of transformations reduces experience to data, and those who are granted access to the data to statistics.

Still, the archive will remain. Even as the Theatre Museum became defunct, materials were shuffled in a collection to Blythe House. As the original site's use is still debated, the recording of performance continues. The will be fed with materials; it will continue to be a site of pilgrimage. The end of the archive is still not the end of the archive. Archive fever in conjunction with a love of bureaucracy, a compulsion to organise, and a fear of the undocumented makes the archive untouchable. Dependence upon archival institutions has given rise to a necessary evil, or at the very least – sanctioned mediocrity. The ancient Greeks said it would be so<sup>16</sup>; contemporary governmental, educational, and funding bodies have deemed the work to be good. The experience of researchers, practitioners, and lay people is irrelevant. To simply make materials available (availability being subject to change) does not fulfil the task of the archive. Availability is not accessibility.

With no definition of the archive, a slew of criticism and few words of praise it would seem that contributing to the archive and examining its documents is a waste of time and precious hard drive. Yet, without definition or a certain future we continue to prepare, to set aside, and store up. 'The trouble *de l'archive* stems from a *mal d'archive*. We are *en mal d'archive*: in need of archives' (Derrida 1996, p.91). The recorded performance is certainly in need of the archive as it is this institutional body which bestows upon the audiovisual record documentary status. Without the

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<sup>16</sup> A reference to Derrida's exploration of the relationship between the Greeks' *arkheion*, 'initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the *achons*, those who commanded' (Derrida 1996, p.2) and the modern archive.

archive, the recorded performance has no legitimacy. Unfortunately, it is within the archive that the recorded performance finds itself trapped, rather than legitimizing and circulating, the archive renders the recordings immobile.

Given the nature of our technological age it should come as no surprise that a solution to archival complications comes in the form of the digital archive. Issues of access and circulation are instantly eradicated when materials become immediately available through online databases and websites. The internet allows one to explore the bowels of multiple archives, and the materials therein without travelling to the physical site. The constraints of distance and time no longer leave archival materials unused and under appreciated. Furthermore, digital archives simplify processes of comparing materials not only within a single archive, but provide a user with the opportunity to compare materials that are stored hundreds or thousands of kilometres apart. Even the circulation of live performance clips through popular websites furthers access to the recorded performance form, if not performances in their entirety.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the audiovisual nature of the documents is a benefit in the process of digital archiving, where it had proven to be a complication for inclusion in traditional archives. Non-traditional documents find a well suited home in the non-traditional archive.

The obstacles of the technological archive are akin to the difficulties of the live performance turned recording. The concrete archive is scheduled to vanish into cyberspace; meanwhile, vanishing performances are finding permanence in audiovisual formats. Seamus Ross (1998) characterises the transforming of the archive from physical to digital stating, '...a significant cultural artefact has become

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<sup>17</sup> Popular websites like You Tube can provide a source for recorded performance materials, while the University of Bristol continues to develop a professional database, the Live Art Archives (Arts and Humanities Data Service 2007, You Tube 2007).

soft and ephemeral' (p.23). The potential for exceptional recorded performance archives has never been greater than at this moment, the moment when the archive is becoming ephemeral, and performance finds itself permanent.<sup>18</sup>

Where the archive has lent legitimacy to recorded performances, recorded performances may now provide status and function for the evolving digital archive. While databases and websites continue to be developed, recorded performances are available for immediate usage and access.

As a documentation medium, digital archiving has more versatility and more technical and intertextual capabilities than annotated texts or linear video recordings (Dixon 1999, p.171).

Where traditional archival materials (playbills, promptbooks, posters, text etc.) could only provide fragmentary evidence for examination, the audiovisual materials of the modern archive can provide lengthier fragments for consideration. As digital archives are further developed, the quality of recordings will come under increased scrutiny, necessitating improvements in the documents themselves.

### **Back to the Future**

Forward momentum is not only an issue of the archive's imminent modernisation; it is the crux of the archive's existence. Without a future moment there is no need for preservation. The archive is the projection that a future society will

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<sup>18</sup> While imperfect, such a moment may finally resolve Taylor's (2003) competing repertoire of performance and archive of solidity.

The rift, I submit, does not lie between the written and spoken word, but between the *archive* of supposedly enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, bones) and so-called ephemeral *repertoire* of embodied practice/knowledge (i.e., spoken language, dance, sports, ritual)' (p.19). The rift may soon close with ephemeral archives housing evidence of ephemeral performance.



have the desire to look back. The value of the archive is in its preservation of a past that cannot be accessed, and an inheritance for a future that may never arrive. Issues of inheritance and linear time would seem the most obvious answers to the question, '[h]ow does the housing of memory lead both backwards and forwards to the principle of the Archon, the patriarch?' (Schneider 2001, p.102). The archive is the birthright of the Taylor's archiving oppressors and Derrida's destruction-driven archivists. Materials must be confined in the archive because the possibility of circulation will raise questions of ownership, and the ownership of memory is far too important to be left to chance. Performances that are born of experiences outside of this privileged lineage are those which '...become especially problematic when they make it into the archive' (Taylor 2003, p.268). These problematic performances may prove to be a solution. These more colloquial performances, which do not fit linear models of inheritance, are those that could find immediate relevance in more accessible online forums.

In order for recorded documents to influence and improve the archive, someone must take notice of their present value rather than reflecting on the past and hypothesizing a future.

In other words, a performance venue is a place where performances occur in the present, while an archive is a resting place for memories of performances past (Auslander 2001, p.123).

Such a description does not inspire hope in the archive of the future, but contributes to the definition of the archive as a warehousing facility. No one knows what to do with these documented events at the moment, but maybe someone will have some use for them in the future. The trouble is that future moments of usefulness may never come.

'For Derrida the archive is elusive and always just beyond reach, it "slips away" just as memory could be seen to do' (Gorman 2000, p.92). The archive is

constantly beyond reach because its value as a resource is not appreciated – the value of the archive is measured in terms of antiquity and projected value.

So, we have here a work on memory which reverts from past to future, and this revision from past to future is by way of drawing out the exemplary significance of past events (Ricoeur 1999, p.9).

The process of archiving dictates the past - that which is archived is immediately made historical. The 'future' merely acts as a passive receptor. 'The archivization produces as much as it records the event' (Derrida 1996, p.17). This process leads us back to the patriarch, as the significance (or insignificance) of events is determined by those individuals in positions of power. Taylor's (2003) oppressive archivists strike again as

...events which did happen are always marginalised by a system of the structures of belonging that define what is worthy of being archived, how it is going to be archived, where it is going to be archived in order to maintain a particular visibility of that "event" (Robialksa 2002, p.7).

The archive not only dictates what *has* occurred, but also effaces events so they have not occurred. As a hypothetical example, a theatre company could choose to erase the occurrence of a past performance by choosing to exclude its documentation from the theatre's own archives. The process of archiving, choices of inclusion and exclusion, dictate rather than present history. The past and future are inextricably linked in the archive as future perceptions of historical moments are ordained rather than discovered in the archive. The intent gaze upon the future moment may be a mere symptom of the tendency 'to privilege bones as index of a flesh that was once, being "once" (as in both time and singularity) only after the fact' (Schneider 2001, p.104).

The selection of materials does limit and guide the future researcher; however, it is the aging process which gives value to these materials. Once blessed, these

documents obtain relic status with age. The past may manipulate future events, but it is the future which validates the archive.

It is not the question of a concept dealing with the past that might already be at our disposal or not be at our disposal...It is the question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow. The archive: if we want to know what that will have meant, we will only know in times to come. Perhaps (Derrida 1996, p.36).

The future holds the promise of a definition, a purpose, a clear resolve – perhaps. For this chance, this hope for a meaningful archive we continue to store, to set aside, protect and preserve these fragments. This emergency hoarding mentality is to the exclusion of any use of the archive in the present. The current use of the archive is limited to access to the distant past. Contemporary documents are not yet ready for scholarly use or even curious viewing. There is nothing of Derrida's (1996) '...three actual presents, which would be the past present, the present present, and the future present...' (p.80) in the archive as it is the *present* which never seems to be of relevance. Present archival activity devotes itself to the remembrance of the past and worship of the future, but does not seem concerned about the contemporary state, use of, or access to the archive. Rather than three presents, archival activity seems to focus exclusively on the future and the past, with any consideration for the present occurring only incidentally.

For those brave pilgrims who wander into the archive to declare, 'But I'm here now!' our salvation lies in technological advancement. In order to preserve the 21<sup>ST</sup> and late 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, archives have had to adapt to increasingly digitised documentation.

To take advantage of the new opportunities offered by IT, new approaches, skills, and expertise are required. Training and education are necessary to

change the traditional world of archives. Only when archives succeed in this will they be able to meet the need of users, researchers, and historians, reveal new perspectives and opportunities, and deliver new services (Hofman 1998, p.337).

Electronic storage provides greater accessibility and a wider range of resources that are immediately available whether an event took place twenty years or two hours ago. While archival focus may remain electronic information for the future, accessibility, speed, and range of documentation inadvertently improves for the contemporary scholar. In order to pass on this electronic legacy training, tools, and software must be developed here and now (Ross 1998, p.23). As test subjects, modern researchers will have access to online archives, software, and databases that will improve the quality of contemporary research while informing decisions archival institutions make about the preservation of electronic information.

Attention to electronic archives and audiovisual documentation gives status to recorded performances which have found themselves shot and stored with relatively little consideration of the recordings as legitimate documents. The rise of online archives is beginning to bring these preserved performances to the light of day, or at least the light of the monitor.

The dominance of documentary presentation of performance art in cyberspace suggests that cyberspace is not primarily a venue for performance art itself, at least not at present; rather it is primarily a venue for performance documentation (Auslander 2001, p.123).

The internet is not becoming a means of experiencing performance, but of accessing performance for academic purpose. The possibilities for recorded performances are endless when stored on a hard drive rather than a remote collection. Where an archive's accessibility or deteriorating VHS collection may impede study, web

accessible recordings transcend locale and dated formats. Online archives and databases not only solve issues of electronic storage for future usage, but also enrich contemporary dialogues and academic study. While ensuring the future of the archive, electronic documentation acts as a 'memory aid' (Derrida 1996, p.14) to those who have experienced a performance, a director, an actor, or a movement. Audiovisual materials are expanding the scope of the archive to include the scholar of the moment, with no detriment to the future scholar of the past.

Edward Higgs' *History and Electronic Artefacts* (1998) examines complications and opportunities presented by increasingly digitised information for archives, museums, and libraries alike. Still, the solutions presented make for a brighter, tidier future with a few scenarios improving the quality of research institutions of the moment. As archives undergo this transformation, one cannot help but fear that the desire to obtain, catalogue, and lock away, will be replaced by a process of obtaining, inputting, and pressing save. 'Now, on the brink of a digital revolution that both utilises and threatens to displace writing, the body again seems poised to disappear in a virtual space that eludes embodiment' (Taylor 2003, p.16). Just as Phelan (1993) fears that documentation may lead to the death of the ephemeral, Taylor foresees a future which has no corporal form. The body may enter the virtual space, but its disappearance cannot be eminent when one must first document the body before releasing it into a digitised sphere. The document, rather than the body, ceases to exist in a virtual space characterised by transmission.

The range of archives available for comparison is another considerable benefit of the electronic archive or database. 'The capacity to compare a variety of materials from a myriad of collections may soon be a reality as ease of access continues to be a focus in preparing the archive for the future.'

As an example of what could be done, archives within Europe could develop a form of common gateway for access, with a common interface and retrieval function (Hofman 1998, p.336).

Such an action would not only simplify accessibility, but would encourage a greater depth of study, allowing users to draw comparisons that might have otherwise gone unnoticed (Auslander 2001, p.124). In the course of comparing and contrasting numerous sources from a variety of resources, scholars may begin to construct more accurate critical accounts from the mediated archives of the past. If the archive cannot claim objectivity, at least the academic can access multiple subjective accounts. The sharing of electronic information and resources amongst institutions, organisations, and individuals stands to revitalise archive and archival usage alike.

The many benefits of digitised archives and databases do not solve the complications that are inherent in the process of making the archive technologically friendly. As discussed in regard to the documentation of live performance, audiovisual representations complicate issues of presence and disappearance.

Digital technologies will further ask us to reformulate our understanding of "presence," site (now the unlocalizable online "site"), the ephemeral, and embodiment' (Taylor 2003, p.4-5).

Confusion regarding whether or not an object or person 'is really there' gives rise to a second line of questioning for the viewer, 'was I really there?' The transmission of live events has become an event unto itself; live performances ranging from the Metropolitan Opera's season to Hannah Montana concerts are broadcast to cinemas and billed as experience similar to live performance attendance. In some cases, these events do occur in real time, with off site audiences tele-participating, while other events are screenings of past events. These commercial endeavours

contribute to the confusion in defining recorded performance because it is not always financially advantageous to distinguish the difference between live performance transmitted in real time and the screening of a recording of a past occurrence. The live feed of a simulcast is more alluring than the footage of a completed event. While a simulcast allows one to take part remotely, a document presents the traces of that which was missed.

Philip Auslander (2001) considers the online site as a setting for original live performance. His recommendation is a step beyond the simultaneous transmission, a call for the creation of performance solely for circulation through the internet.

Auslander (2001) states,

I am suggesting that if one is to take seriously the possibility of using cyberspace as a performance art venue, a site at which performances can occur, one has to be prepared to define performance art in such a way as to include performances carried out by electronic entities, for only electronic entities can take the electronic realm of cyberspace as a site on which to perform (p.125).

While scholars are still negotiating the relationship between technology and performance, I see little hope for the acceptance of electronic performance as live performance. Such suggestions may not only be met with scepticism, but may further misconceptions regarding the nature of documentation compared to live performance turned recording. Before such performances find a niche on the internet, the contradictions of live performance documentation must be resolved.

At a moment when the internet and electronic databases stand to legitimise recorded performance documents and increase the accessibility of these materials, Auslander (2001) claims these grounds as sites of performance. Audiovisual documents of live performance are of importance, and should have resources and space made available before the internet is championed as the new home of

performance. While recorded performances are feared as 'substitute performances,' but exist as documents, Auslander advocates the technological as a site *for* performance and for the circulation *of* performance.

Inasmuch as any artist who wishes to can post a video performance on the web at little cost, it constitutes a simple and direct way to distribute performances to an interested audience (Auslander 2001, p.124).

As audiovisual formats of live performance continue to proliferate, creators and users of these documents must be mindful of the distinctions between those performances created primarily for internet circulation, and recordings which circulate in the same cyberspace having been created as live performances. Recorded performance documents and cyber-performances share a great deal in common as both improve accessibility and provide greater educational opportunities. With the rise of technological performances, audiovisual recording, and online file sharing it would be naïve to deny the eventual rise of online performance. In order for archives of live performance to thrive simultaneously, the functions of creation and documentation must be clearly distinguished. Where the online performance is akin to the transmission of the New York Opera to cinemas worldwide, the live performance archive is an accessible resource, the offspring of the physical archive.

Vigilance will be of utmost importance in the process of making recorded performances available electronically. This is not to suggest that access should be strictly guarded or that archives should be hesitant to establish online databases. Just as recordings should not be shot and stored, digital recordings should not be uploaded and forgotten. 'Preservation is associated with costs...Electronic records or resources cannot be left to languish unattended; they require continual attention' (Ross 1998, p.17). Attending to the electronic archive will not only require software updates,



website management, and IT support, it will also involve providing users with information about the documents that are available and how they came to the collection. Without this supplementary information electronic documents have no worth as scholarly materials. The promotion of the electronic archive must include education about the nature, abilities, and incapacities of existing documents. Such education should also make sharp distinctions between recorded performances as documents and performances available on other sites. In order to truly provide the best available materials, archive professionals must ensure that they are making performance documents, rather than performances, available.

As the lines between archive, electronic archive, and database blur so do the lines between the archive and other institutions of information. W. Boyd Rayward (1998) makes a case for the merger of various institutions in the age of electronic information.

...[T]he advent of electronic sources of information and their ever-increasing volume and variety will require a major redefinition and integration of the role of the archives, museums, and research libraries (Rayward 1998, p.207).

Such a realignment can only serve to improve accessibility and scope as the nature of research changes drastically with the rise of electronic documentation. Perhaps, those institutions that have easily adapted to the needs of the modern researcher will inspire other institutions to look beyond the paper document. With an increase in scope and accessibility, a coalition of various institutions can only further the evolving archive.

The recorded performance is in need of an archive. Ideally, such an archive would house physical recordings while making the documents available in electronic format.

There are several myths attending the archive. One is that it is unmediated, that objects located there might mean something outside the framing of the archival impetus itself (Taylor 2003, p.19).

The archive will provide recorded performance documents with meaning, and give them relevance in the fields of theatre and performance studies. The changing nature of the archive places the recorded performance in an ideal position to modernise the archive. The relationship is posed to be symbiotic. With the increased visibility of recorded performances comes the increased visibility of the archive itself. The increased visibility of the recorded performance draws attention to the live performance which it documents.

And witnessing is transferable: the theatre, like the testimony, like the photograph, film, or report, can make witnesses of others. The (eye)witness sustains both the archive and the repertoire (Taylor 2003, p.211).

The modernization of the archive creates witnesses, rather than preparing for the eventual witness.

Technological capabilities have allowed for the preservation of both past and present, without looking to the future for purpose. We may be no closer to a true definition of the archive, but we have managed to increase its function without an absolute statement of purpose. The archive not only shows faith in future society, but acts selfishly for contemporaries who also have a need to reflect. After all, the archive has and will continue to be maintained by the same

...compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irresponsible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement (Derrida 1996, p.91).

This homesickness and grief contributes to the desire to record our vanishing performances. We do not look back hoping to replicate, but needing to assure

ourselves that it really happened, that something of our experience is still there. The archived performance is confirmation of the disappeared, and the greater the scope of the archive the more missing ghosts that can be brought to light.

The work is being done to increase the scope of the archive and improve its accessibility in the present. The onus is now on the user of the archive to press for more materials, to request electronic information as needed. Without an expression of this desire, a statement of need, the materials will go untouched, documents will remain buried. As electronic documents increase in number, and circulation increases standards must be created for the appropriate study of these documents. 'We need to rethink our method of analysis' (Taylor 2003, p.27). The archive may make these documents accessible, but the users must establish the criteria for study. Without means and methods of approaching recorded performance documents, recordings could become irrelevant in spite of proliferation. The archive provides the materials, but the user must determine the worth. After all, it is the future society who inherits the responsibility of analyzing the materials. The inheritance has been distributed; a responsibility now exists to make use of a gift. In order to make use, we must establish a methodology for recorded performances.

### **Recipes: Approaching and Improving the Product in the Can**

‘With the development of the electronic media, the industry that shapes consciousness has become the pacemaker for the social and economic development of societies in the late industrial age. It infiltrates into all other sectors of production, takes over more and more directional and control functions, and determines the standard of the prevailing technology’ (Enzensberger 1986, p.96).

The physical, bureaucratic archive may be forced into an early retirement as online archives offer endless storage space and relatively little upkeep. The ease of recording, storing, and distributing has led to the creation of educational CD-ROMs and websites for accessing performance documents, but the logistics of filming are not greatly improved, nor are the recordings approached with any greater knowledge of their form. It seems to me that we have skipped a step in the creation of recorded performance documents as modes of storage and transmission have multiplied and improved, while the documents themselves, and methods of recording and studying the recordings, have been left unchanged.

A performance recording created in 2007 has more in common with a 1989 recording than it has uncommon. The quality of images may have improved, but the means of recording and analysing are unchanged. While recordings are becoming increasingly accessible, understanding and appreciation of recorded performance remains in the most infantile of stages. Steve Dixon’s article, ‘Digits, Discourse, and Documentation: Performance Research and Hypermedia’ (1999), details the work of ‘the multimedia theatre company The Chameleons Group’ (p.171) and the creation of educational CD-ROMs. Dixon (1999) states:

*Chameleons 2* attempts to push back the generic boundaries (educational/historical, artist documentary) that characterise current CD-ROM publications or performance. It aims to expand the territory of “digital theatre”: to offer more comprehensive performance documentation; to examine the genesis of devised performances from multiple viewpoints; to present critical theory in new visual hypermedia forms (p.155).

Unfortunately, Dixon (1999) does not consider the improvement of recorded performances to be important in *Chameleons*' mandate. He goes on to state,

[t]hough video is a notoriously blunt and visually flat instrument with which to record the highly subtle, interactive, and spatially complex medium of performance, it nonetheless offers a method of recording a permanent audiovisual record of an otherwise transitory temporal event (p.156).

Perhaps, I am somewhat naïve to have hoped that a company like *Chameleons* that is dedicated to the creation and distribution of digital performance materials would have taken on the task of improving recorded theatrical performance. Instead, it seems that recorded performances are never to be improved, but constantly subsumed into other documents with no further attempts at improvement or analysis beyond 'pale representations of live events' (Dixon 1999, p.153). Fortunately, technological advancements in the nine years since 'Digits, Discourse, and Documentation' (Dixon 1999) was published have improved upon the form in spite of a lack of deliberate action towards such an end.

The *Chameleons* are not the only theatrical body to implement recorded performances without examining means of improving recordings themselves. The Arts and Humanities Data Service's *Creating Digital Performance Resources: a Guide to Good Practice* (Smith 2002) provides great detail for would-be practitioners and online archivists about the processes of creating digital archives, databases, CD-ROMs, and websites. However, the guide provides absolutely no instruction as to the creation of the very recorded performances that are to be uploaded or streamed. It would seem that the recorded performance has gone from controversial material to accepted mediocrity, a move that maintains the status quo of the document, leaving no room for improvement or evolution of the recorded performances themselves.

In the midst of increased capabilities it seems the appropriate time to revisit recorded performances in order to improve the form of documents that are seeing greater circulation. Further development of recorded performance documents can only serve to improve the bodies which are attempting to circulate performance documents through digital means, and improvement of the documents themselves will contribute to the advancement of digital storage, archiving, and educational materials. Rather than accept recordings as mediocre, efforts must be made to improve recorded performances through a greater understanding of the capabilities of the form. Attempts must be made to consider the ways in which recorded performances are approached and utilised in the creation of new documents.

### **Interpretation and Notation**

'Thus in filming a play we should more properly speak not of replication but of quite different processes, translation and notation, which in turn must be distinguished from each other' (Carlson 1981, p.b3).

In the academic discourse surrounding recorded theatrical performance, Patrice Pavis (1982) and Marvin Carlson (1981) have called for a distinction to be made between recorded performances intended to 'notate' performance and those intended to 'interpret' performance. For my purposes, I assume that recorded performance documents are notations rather than interpretations.<sup>19</sup> Interpretation is a more appropriate term for adaptations which base themselves upon original performance, while a process of documentation involves effort to preserve original elements. However, Pavis (1982) clarifies that while a distinction is made between

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<sup>19</sup> Interpretations being adaptations, or those recordings which are transferred from original playing space, and documented at a time when there is no live audience, which is to say those recordings which document a production, rather than the performance of a production. See discussion of nomenclature.

processes of interpreting and notating, any process of notation or documentation inherently involves a certain amount of interpretation.

To "notate" the performance inevitably means to interpret, to make a more or less conscious choice among the multitude of signs of the performance deemed noteworthy (Pavis 1982, p.111).

This distinction between notation and interpretation clarifies expectations for recorded performances as it clearly defines a recorded performance's function as a document rather than as a performance. While a recording cannot capture a performance perfectly, the intention is that the resulting document serve as a record, or notation of the original event, rather than an interpretation of the original performance.

The creation of a *document* allows for variances in methods and approach, while a *recorded performance* may raise expectations for consideration of the document as a performance unto itself. Which is not to suggest that certain recordings cannot exist as performance, but that those recordings which strive to impose a concept upon the existing production seek to create rather than to document. Pavis' (1982) 'interpretation' is inherent in the process of 'notation', but allows for a distinction to be made between those recordings which layer second interpretation onto a production, and those which incidentally interpret in the process of documentation.

This interpretation (the director and the production team's) itself becomes the subject of a second interpretation (concretization) on the part of the spectator, one which has to be taken into account as soon as we try to establish definite limits for the possible variation in the reception of a work at different moments in history by different audiences (Pavis 1982, pp.70-1).

In clarifying interpretation Pavis (1982) states that interpretation is inherent to any act of spectatorship. To document, or 'notate', a theatrical moment is to document an

audience's interpretation while presenting an opportunity for the viewer of the recording to take part in such an act as well. In order to better utilise recorded performances it is imperative that these distinctions be made and understood. Both those creating and viewing recorded performances should take into account degrees of notation and interpretation of a given performance in order to establish what type of document is being created and for what purpose it has been accessed.

Pavis (1982) and Carlson (1981) make the distinctions between interpretation and notation because they believe the documents themselves to be invaluable. Determining the function of a given recording is not merely a matter of verbiage, but of improving the creation and usage of necessary documents. Carlson (1981) states,

But despite the potential confusion arising from the iconicity of film, a filmic record may potentially notate a staged performance in essentially the same manner as these more symbolic systems, by creating codified preservable traces of ephemeral events to serve as a guide for their future attempted replication (Carlson 1981, p.64).

From a historical point of view, Carlson advocates a system of notation in order that performances of a period can be recreated at a later date with greater accuracy than has been available in the past. For such purposes, camera placement, angle, and shot decisions are of less importance, as it is the audiovisual record that is of importance rather than the aesthetic of the document itself. Pavis (1982) recognises the value of the recording as a document, a document which gives a performance meaning outside of its original playing space.

So not only is notation a "necessary evil," but it is precisely notation which gives the theatrical performance its meaning: there exists *no* description and interpretation without some pre-existing form of *notation* (Pavis 1982, pp.112-113).



In the course of considering recorded performance as notation and/or interpretation, one frees the document from having to exist as either an impartial record or a work of art unto itself. Still, these distinctions are only the first step in increasing the understanding and accessibility of recorded performance documents.

### **Establishing Reading Skills**

'The recognition of the separate *languages* of film and stage should protect us from any illusion that a film can replicate a stage experience, but this myth remains, and continues to confuse many theoretical considerations of this process' (Carlson 1981, p.b3).

Annabelle Melzer's (1995a, 1995b), Gay McAuley's (1994), Marco de Marinis' (1985) and Rachel Varney and Denise Fensham's (2000) *New Theatre Quarterly* articles all call for the development of 'reading skills' specific to the viewing and analysis of recorded performance. The continuing call to action seems to be inspiring little reaction as we are no closer to set standards, let alone an ontology or methodology twenty two years after the publishing of Marinis' (1985) article, and seven years after Varney and Fensham's (2000) latest request. 'Where theatre studies has well-developed methodologies for analyzing live performance, viewing and reading video requires its own articulated approach.' (Varney and Fensham 2000, p.94) If the task of theatrical documentation is to be taken seriously it would only seem logical that the individuals making and studying these documents would be the ones to develop the reading skills that are constantly referenced, but never defined.

The difficulties and disappointments that have been experienced with video recordings of performance may indeed, be due less to the shortcomings of video as a recording medium, or to the resistance of theatre to reproduction, than to our failure to develop the "reading" skills necessary to make appropriate use of video recordings, and also to our unrealistic expectations in relation to them (McAuley 1994, p.183-4).

The suggestion is not that a viewer tackle a pile of videos and 'figure it out' for herself, but that each individual who makes use of the documents accept the responsibility of approaching these recordings with an understanding of what they can and cannot accomplish, what they are and what they are not. Varney and Fensham (2000) call for responsible viewing which takes just such issues under consideration. A viewer familiar with theatrical or performance studies does not necessarily require a formula or diagram to successfully glean information from recorded performances, but will make better use of recorded documents if she understands the limitations of recordings.

A more casual viewer must understand live theatrical form before approaching the evidence it has left behind; a document is useless without knowledge of its function. In order for a law student to understand court documents she must first understand the nature of court proceedings. In a similar manner, it would be impossible for the viewer of a recording to truly understand the audiovisual evidence of the document if he did not have a basic understanding of live theatrical performance. With even a basic understanding of live theatrical experience, the recognition of differences in original and copy will become less of an issue. While Carlson's (1981) belief that

[m]any have dreamed of a notation system as simple and workable as that available for music, which, although it has always been selective in which elements of the musical experience it has preserved, has made the analysis of the musical event essentially as practical as the analysis of the written dramatic script (p.b2).

is certainly promising; it goes without saying that a desire to create a system of notation does not beget a means of analysis. The work is only half done in having identified the need for and potential of recorded performance documents.

In the hopes of establishing these necessary reading skills, potential pitfalls and misconceptions have been identified; the hope being that viewers will bear these in mind in the course of analysing and using recorded performances as documents. The first potential landmine is a confusion of perspective in the transference of the live to the recorded.

Theatre is multi-focused, multi-“voiced”, made up of many different sign systems using many different channels of communication: but film, video and photography all impose the single perspective of the camera’s eye on this multiplicity, while the camera also “sees” much less than the human eye (McAuley 1994, p.186).

McAuley (1994) reminds her reader that while a recorded performance may preserve aspects of a production, it cannot capture the entirety of an experience. Such a claim may seem somewhat simplistic, but the sophistication of recording can present a copy that seems a perfect recreation of the original when it in fact exists as incomplete record.<sup>20</sup> As the process of recording live performance has continued to improve, digital technology presents more channels for capturing these various facets of performance which McAuley (1994) references. Still, it is important that a viewer be mindful of past restraints when accessing earlier recordings, or utilising non-digital documents. In spite of technological advancement, limitations remain.

The second potential downfall involves viewer perception when confronted with theatrical space in an audiovisual format.

...[T]heatre space is three-dimensional (real) but perceived as artificial, film space is undimensional but is perceived as real. Working in a theatre space there is a logical continuity, in film we encounter a discontinuity of space (Melzer 1995b, p.270).

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<sup>20</sup> See Chapter 2 debate over the creation of recorded performances for a more through investigation of these concerns over seeming completeness.

This complication of form is more an issue in transference than in reading, but complicates the process of analysing for a viewer versed in both televisual and theatrical languages. These languages are further confused for a viewer more familiar with television and cinematic acting than stage acting.

Video records of live performance also highlight key differences in scale between the two media; for example, theatrical acting appears physically and vocally over-expanded in comparison to the internalised performances prevalent in conceived-for-camera film and television drama. (Dixon 1999, p.171)

While a viewer will comprehend that recorded performance is not television, film, or video, she will not have a means of analysing or evaluating recorded performance. As we have established the form is not performance, but documentation, so the viewer must be led to approach recording as a specific type of documentary, one which cannot be evaluated by its original form or subsequent reproduction.

### **Warning: This Video of a Theatrical Performance is Neither Theatre Nor Video**

'...the users of video documents need to be aware that what they are seeing is neither theatrical performance nor television drama, and that the onus is on them to work to interpret the information contained in these documents' (McAuley 1994, p.192).

The greatest action that can be taken in advocating the use of recorded performance is to change the expectations of the users of recorded performance documents. This is not to suggest that a list be compiled of what a recorded performance can or cannot accomplish, but that any remaining belief that recordings should accurately and completely reproduce a live theatrical event should be challenged. Melzer (1995b) states,

...the anticipation of the viewer/receiver of the performance document on video, should be curtailed by eliminating any expectation that equivalent (much less the same) sensation will be experienced in viewing the tape as when watching the live performance (p.260).

A culture bombarded by digitised imagery of live events should easily be able to make such a distinction. Live and filmed sporting events, concerts, and awards shows remain popular with audiences comprehending the difference in 'being there' and 'watching'. It seems unnecessary to remind an individual that watching a theatre performance is not the same as attending a theatre performance. Generally, a viewer will possess the reading skills necessary to approach recorded performance documents, and needs only to be reminded of this fact.

Gregory Ulmer (1989) implores the academic community to embrace televisual studies in a way that incorporates media (especially video), jargon, popular culture, and personal experience in *Teletheory*. He sees written and televisual culture as being needlessly in opposition, and states that '...the time has come to think in positive terms about how to bring academic discourse into the age of television' (Ulmer 1989, p.11). While Ulmer's (1989) arguments more specifically relate to bringing discussions of video into the classroom, his advocacy of televisual studies as an academic discipline is immediately relevant to recorded performance documents, and their potential usage within theatrical and performance studies.

Hence, my approach, which is to assume that video is not something in need of explanation, but something whose operations have changed the conditions of explanation itself (Ulmer 1989, p.XII).

Ulmer (1989) puts forth an argument which states that television, and video (DVD more recently) have changed modes and methods of communication and comprehension, and that to ignore the influence of these mediums is simply irresponsible.

In the course of considering notation, Patrice Pavis (1982) warns that,

[s]ymbolic notation, on the contrary, is not immediately comprehensible, since in this type of digital communication, the reader must possess the key to the sign conventions (p.113).

Luckily, Ulmer (1989) would lead one to conclude that we have come to possess this ability, as the technological audiovisual formats are now the standard of communication. 'Everything now, in its own way, wants to be television' (Ulmer 1989, p.11). Network and cable television have changed news, education, and entertainment permanently. Those who view recorded performance have experience with television; they simply do not have experience with this type of television. Thus, the complication would seem to be the methods of analyzing recorded documents, rather than the comprehension of them. Perhaps, the viewer of the recorded performance is perfectly aware of the abilities and inabilities of the form, but is unable to articulate the analysis as concrete standards for assessment have yet to come to the forefront. The time has come '...to intervene in the apparatus of literacy on behalf of video' (Ulmer 1989, p.6). An understanding of new forms, whether or not this comprehension is now inherent, must be articulated in a written format. Viewers do have the necessary skills to comprehend audiovisual notations; the specific skill set must simply be extracted from the larger one, which technological users unknowingly put to use each time they are presented with audiovisual materials. A viewer implements a different set of skills when following a sitcom, an educational special, and a televised sporting event. An increase in recorded performance viewings will hone viewers' skills as they learn to extract and understand the information in recorded performance documents. With greater circulation of recordings and materials relating to recordings, these documents only stand to see further improvement. As users educate themselves they will not only improve their own

experiences with recorded performance documents, but will also be able to provide practitioners with useful information on the spectator's viewpoint for future documentation. Still, the solution to making recorded performances more accessible is not the creation of a decisive 'how to', but of a 'why to'.

### **Stating Function and Aligning Expectation**

'Yet despite the clear advantages that filmic recording offers over earlier forms of notation, it also presents serious difficulties which must be taken into account in any utilization of this material for analysis or for attempted historical recreation. Before considering some of these advantages and difficulties, however, we must make clear what process is involved in the filming of a play and what expectations we bring to that process' (Carlson 1981, p.62).

Like any document, a recorded performance can (and should) be used for numerous purposes. Nonetheless, those involved in the process of creation and documentation could greatly improve the quality of a resulting document by recording with aspects of a production in mind, dependent upon what they hope to document. 'As will become apparent, the basic question is not *how to* carry out the notation, but *for what purpose*' (Pavis 1982, p.111). A recorded document which focuses upon directing and incorporates commentary specific to the directorial process will be of far more interest and usage than a stationary recording which focuses only on a single performance. Similarly, different angles and interviews would be necessary for a recording that examines period costuming, and one which documents method acting in relation to a specific production. Patrice Pavis (1982) states that the most effective documents

"select" from the performance and the text certain indications – details of *mise en scene*, of costume, meanings suggested by the text, the actors' performances – to build up a total meaning, discovering in the chosen signs redundancies or contradictions, confirming or refuting the proposed interpretation (p.26).

Greater specificity in the process of documentation can only improve the resulting document.

While it may be tempting to create a laundry list of do's and do not's for the process of recording performances, a simple statement of purpose can accomplish a great deal in improvement of the form.

But even before deciding on one of these basic modes of notation, one has to determine the function of such a description, adapting the transcription accordingly (Pavis 1982, pp.113-14).

The practice of documentation for the sake of preservation is useful, but preservation is inherent in the process of recording specific characteristics of a performance.

Recorded performances will be of greater use as the documents become more specialised. While live performances (and resulting literature) are categorised into genres and periods, recorded performances proliferate with no distinctions made between dissimilar recordings.

This lack of distinction has led to unrealistic expectations as recorded performances have come to be compared to live performances. A recorded performance document fails as live performance, fails as video, and cannot be recognised as document because there is no clear definition of the form. Keeping quiet in regards to what a recording can or cannot accomplish has rendered the performance recording ineffective. Such claims should not be made to pigeonhole usage, but to clarify the purpose of documentation. Currently, recorded performances can *only* fail as a lack of statement dictates that a recording exist as a complete and impartial record. As no recording can serve such a purpose, each recording fails to deliver the magical record of the ephemeral event. The viewer may have unrealistic expectations, but it is the practitioners and archivists who have failed to explain what



recordings generally accomplish, and the nature of specific recordings. '...[I]n order to recover its initial character of theatre-fact, one now has to take into account its newly acquired specificity' (Pavis 1982, p.122). Practitioners should work to determine function, and establish what they hope a recording to accomplish, but subsequently the onus is on the viewer to align his expectations with capabilities of the form.

Marvin Carlson (1981) makes a case for a decrease in expectations in order to better understand recorded performance stating:

...rather than deplore the partial perspectives of filmic notation and its inevitable distortions of external material into the terms of its own discourse, we should remember that any system of signification by the very nature of the semiotic system will be both partial and distorting, and consider what the particular features of the system have to offer in terms of what we expect from it (p.612).

Expect disappointment when approaching the recorded performance without expectations specific to the form. One should also expect disappointment if she does not consider limits of a recording before utilising a document. No matter how thorough a recording may be, regardless of the budget a documenter has been given, there are tasks that a recorded performance cannot accomplish.

It is a mere transcription or transcoding, which, at best, provides information about the final product's composition of signs, but none about the signs' productivity, i.e., their reception and elaboration by the spectator (Pavis 1982, p.30).

Thus, the at home viewer can evaluate for herself, but without privileged information regarding the live audience reception. Laughter or applause may be evident on a recording, but the subtleties of an audience's engagement (or lack thereof) cannot be fully captured in the course of recording a performance. The recorded record can reflect aspects of a performance, but cannot replicate an event.

Carlson (1981) intervenes,

[i]f we consider film, however, as a medium not for the replication, or even for the translation, but for the notation of the theatrical event, this notably reduces the demand upon it and allows us to consider what difficulties still remain (p.b4).

Rather than demanding that recorded performances change in nature, expand their purview, or provide a different type of record, Carlson (1981) suggests that the viewer re-evaluate his expectations. Such an action does not devalue recorded performance, but allows for creation and distribution with a greater understanding of what these documents are capable of reflecting and analysing.

For the reasons already discussed among others we should not expect this film to produce the same effects as the original, or even be read in the same way, but if we regard it not as reproduction but as notation; these difficulties need not give us serious concern (Carlson 1981, p.b11).

The capabilities of the form lead to an acceptance of shortcomings, as any transcription will be imperfect. In spite of seeming 'losses' recorded documents have provided an account unlike any other format to date. Rather than focusing upon elements of the document that cannot be changed, it seems more worthwhile to concentrate upon actions which could further improve recorded documents.

### **Towards Acceptance**

'For it is simply not enough to improve the quality of the recording, to make the sound less distorted the image more faithful to the original...' (Pavis 1982, p.122).

The state of the recorded performance is a direct result of the rejection of recorded performance as a document. Issues of nomenclature are symptomatic of tentativeness in the course of establishing recorded performance as a viable form of

documentation, rather than an audiovisual copy.<sup>21</sup> The circulation of recorded performances in archives has done a great deal to adjust perceptions, but the body of written work surrounding the documents would suggest that recorded performances continue to be misunderstood and under used. Recorded performance documents are in serious need of a re-branding which emphasises the *documentary*, rather than the *recorded* nature of the materials. The fear of recorded performance as a seeming complete record can only be allayed when recordings are described as evidence, documents which gesture towards a now passed event. 'What the English call "documenting the production" must not simply consist of accumulating documents and reconstituting them without any explanation' (Pavis 1982, p.118). The process of recording a performance seems to be just such a process, the process of capturing imagery, cutting the audiovisual material, and distributing the imagery without any explanation. Decades of such practices must be undone in order to best utilise available technologies.

Carlson (1981) and Pavis (1982) advocate a system which incorporates a variety of materials in the creation of performance documents. Pavis (1982) defines this form of documentation as 'mixed notation' (p.121). Rather than focusing on the creation of one uber-document to reign supreme, Pavis (1982) suggests that '...every possible piece of information relating to the situation of enunciation should be provided...' (p.128). Recorded performance documents can be legitimised in collaborative use with more traditional research materials. A benefit to recorded performance form is its compatibility with other materials. Steve Dixon (1999) believes that the nature of audiovisual documentation allows for '...the flexibility to input a whole range of material...' (p.156). Recorded performance documents should

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<sup>21</sup> See chapter one discussion of nomenclature and the task of labelling recorded performance.

not be approached merely as documents unto themselves, but as a format for the presentation of other forms of evidence. Dixon's discussion of educational CD-ROMs proves that the age of yellowed paper and illegible scroll are now only a memory.

Recorded performance documents will be one of many types of evidence that will see greater circulation as technological capabilities continue to improve. For this reason, it is imperative that these documents find acceptance and usage sooner rather than later. To have captured images and sound is not sufficient, if future generations are to utilise these materials they must have information about the nature and capabilities of the documents. As discussed in chapter 1, it has frequently been claimed that a failure to create recorded performance documents is to deprive future generations of valuable information and resources. I now posit that a failure to educate, improve, utilise, and establish standards for recorded documents is just as irresponsible. These recordings will not sort themselves out with the passage of another twenty years; contemporary users with knowledge of current technology must be the ones to describe these recordings and seek the acceptance of audiovisual documentation which will lead to an increase in usage. '...[T]elevision is the institutionalization of video in our civilization, which does not mean that technology is limited to the purposes of entertainment or information' (Ulmer 1989, p.3). Prejudice against (or fear regarding) non-literary performance evidence must be eradicated in order for invaluable documents to find appropriate usage.

A recent publication by Susan Melrose (2006) provides a glimmer of hope for the formerly ostracised recorded performance. Her article, 'Constitutive ambiguities', considers a recorded document of Theatre du Soleil and director Ariane Mnouchkine. Melrose (2006) does not apologise or legitimise the video before delving into her

argument, but treats the recording as a legitimate document from word one. In fact, Melrose (2006) advocates the use of audiovisual documentation and approaches the recording as another scholar might approach a prompt book or collection of stills.

... I want to identify performance survival simply in terms of *performance continuities* – a term I have borrowed from Brian Massumi – noting as I do so, the performance-continuity, in the university, tends to be assured first by writing, in certain specific registers, and second (but less frequently) by the professional documentation of performance by or through co-operation with expert performance practitioners (Melrose 2006, p.121).

While Melrose recognises the more lowly state of less traditional materials, her own analysis engages with the audiovisual document, critiquing and praising the documentation on its merit as a record, rather than as a performance copy. Such discussions and investigations further the acceptance of recorded performances. These actions will transform perceptions of recorded performances from copies to documents.

A crucial aspect of seeking acceptance for recorded performance documents is the increase and improvement of access to these documents. Literacy has improved over time with the increased circulation of written materials. In a like manner, the circulation of both analogue and digital materials (and written discourse about these materials) has increased understanding of the form and function of electronic media. The recorded performance must now enter these streams of increased circulation in order to further understanding of the nature and capabilities of these documents. The documentary is understood as an educational account of any number of events. Recorded performances will be better understood as performance documentaries than as live theatre on film.

## Sharing Recipes: My Experiences with Recorded Performances

In the course of preparing this thesis, I not only researched general theories and discourse on recorded performance, I viewed recorded performances and described each viewing experience in a brief review. I have included my review of the recordings I accessed while at Blythe House in March of 2007. My hope is that by including these accounts I will contribute to the discourse which I promote, and encourage others to do the same. While my accounts may not see the same circulation as Melrose's (2006) more prolific examination, this process has also demystified the recorded performance for me. Traditional avenues may not exist for study and comparison, but established means of approaching any resulting document of a performance have been more than adequate in preparing these analyses for inclusion.

All V&A recordings begin in the same manner – a long shot of an audience chatting and finding their seats with over-imposed text giving details about the location and date a recording has been made and the declaration, 'Copyright in the performance remains with the creators. Copyright in the recording: The Theatre Museum (Board of Trustees, V&A Museum).' During my March 2007 visit to The V&A's Blythe House Archive I witnessed this copyright declaration five times in the course of viewing Cheek by Jowl's 1996 *Duchess of Malfi* at Wyndham Theatre, a remote recording of Theatre de Complicite's 2000 production of *Light* at The Almedia Theatre<sup>22</sup>, Forkbeard Fantasy's 2004 *Shooting Shakespeare*, Cochrane

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<sup>22</sup> The production of *Light* was described as a remote recording because the document was not the result of recording a live performance. The performance was transmitted from a performance space to an entirely separate space; the document that was broadcast is the record which I accessed. As such, this recording did not actually meet V&A guidelines for recording. In attempting to access the online catalogue of V&A recordings I find that *Light* is no longer listed 11 months after my viewing at Blythe House.

Theatre's 1994 production rehearsal documentary of *King Lear*, and an Out of Joint/Young Vic 1998 co-production of *Our Country's Good*. My intention in surveying these five recordings was to find similarities between all five recordings in hopes of discovering what performance recordings *could* achieve. After two days of frantic note taking, pausing, and rewinding, I came to the conclusion that what a recording documents is completely dependent upon what a production presents.

Months later, I could easily describe the *Light* and *Duchess of Malfi* sets. Meanwhile, my recollection of *Our Country's Good* is best described as a series of close-ups given the cinematic nature of the recording. Audiovisual documentation may be limited in its capture of light and sound, but the focus of each document varies drastically. Given the V&A's rules regarding the process of recording, I was fascinated to discover that each recording all had a different visual quality and overall tone. The National Video Archive of Performance website states,

The National Video Archive of Performance (NVAP) is the outcome of a unique agreement between the Federation of Entertainment Unions and the V&A Theatre Collections enabling us to make high quality archival recordings of live performance without payment of artists' fees. (National Video Archive of Performance 2008)

This 'unique agreement' also impacts the recording process. All V&A recordings must be made from a stationary position from the centre of an auditorium. No cinematic techniques may be used in the process of recording; the camera's range of motion should be no greater than that of a live audience member's sight range (Jill Evans personal communication, 30 March 2007). The non-payment of practitioners' fees allows NVAP to make a greater number of recordings than they would otherwise be able, but it also eliminates any license that could potentially be taken in the course

of recording.<sup>23</sup> The established guidelines are intended to standardise the recordings in the collection in order to document performances without filmic variances affecting the perceived quality of each recording. Still, the existence of these rules does not create an entirely level playing field as the availability of funds (and by extension technological means) varies from recording to recording.<sup>24</sup> The non-digital format of these documents affected the quality of the picture and sound, but the documentary value of each recording remained intact. This series of examinations explores the variance of elements captured in the process of recording and the successes of each document.

*The Duchess of Malfi* Performed by Cheek by Jowl  
Recorded at Wyndham Theatre January 1996

My consideration of *The Duchess of Malfi* recording could function as a critique of the live performance. The recording of this production is so unobtrusive that the recording functions as a dictation of the live event. The lighting is extremely dark, combined with a chessboard inspired set with only movable set pieces and 1940s formal wear costuming (complete with cigarette smoking and accompanying holders). The camera provides an aerial view of sharp, linear movement and blocking on the black and white chequered surface. This view emphasises manipulations and relationships within the production, and the recording makes no use of close-ups. The acting of this production is the key element preserved in the recording. The black and white imagery of the set and costumes leaves a grey area which the actors manoeuvre

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<sup>23</sup> The Film London website states, 'Commercially made recordings are also collected where they are relevant to the performing arts...' (Film London, 2007). Those recordings are not subject to established rules of recording.

<sup>24</sup> See introduction to Chapter 3.



with a keen characterisations and inspired dialogue delivery. The sparseness of the space is matched with precision and deftness in actor performance.

Cheek by Jowl's *Duchess* is not a victim of patriarchal control, but a verbose shrew with a temper. The only aspect of the un-named actor's performance that is lost in the documentation is her disrobing as she seduces Antonio. The Cardinal's sexual tryst also loses its effectiveness when removed from the live playing space. That which is physically jarring in a live performance can lose impact when reduced in scale. This particular scene was especially distant as the videographer chose not to zoom in on the action. These moments of stripped, physical presence lose effectiveness when transferred as the intimacy and immediacy of the naked, live body loses significance in an audiovisual format.

The V&A's recording of Cheek by Jowl's performance seamlessly incorporates a production concept with an eighteenth-century text. In fact, I found myself questioning basic elements of the plot as they had been modified and reincorporated with such ease. The crisp, diagonal line the performers form at the end the performance is the perfect visual for the recording's conclusion. The document manages to present the production's content without betraying the live performance's integrity. It may be a *slant* on the original production, but all the elements are visible, even with the camera at a distance.

My absorption into the recording as an accurate document was so complete that I find myself left with a list of notes about the performance's adherence to the text, rather than a list of notes which questions the recording's interpretation of the live production. This recording is a successful example of the V&A's attempts to document a performance without adapting a performance. The recording functions as a record while leaving the viewer longing for access to the live production.

*Light* Performed by Theatre de Complicite  
Remote Recording at The Almeida Theatre November 2000

While the process of recording *Light* may have been remote, the experience of viewing the recording is far from removed. The narrator asks the audience to consider what is 'real or fake? truth or fiction?' and then plunges the viewer into an intense, disturbing production which takes on issues of religion, violence, sex, sacrifice and morality.<sup>25</sup> My response to *Light* is not surprising, as this particular document was also used as a remote recording; the recording existed as a performance and now exists as a document. As the practitioners would have been aware that this piece would be viewed in a televisual medium, they would have undoubtedly made design and acting choices that would translate as an audiovisual piece. Any attempt to simulate a live audience experience could be deemed a success as the once-removed nature of the production did nothing to lessen the jarring nature of the subject matter. I continue to wonder if I would have been able to sit through the live performance, and would like to think that this is precisely what was intended. Like *Duchess*, this performance was recorded with the use of one stationary camera, which showed the entirety of the small platform stage without utilising close-ups or panning. The intensity of the performance is captured in a clean, comprehensive nature.

The small playing space is perfectly suited to recorded documentation; the viewpoint provided by the camera seems remarkably similar to ideal live viewing. The platform stage resembled a small deck and is bare with the exception of small props and movable set pieces. The visuals of this production dominate the recording

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<sup>25</sup> In the course of revisiting this recording I made use of the Complicite (formerly Theatre de Complicite) website. A brief description and four stills were a great complement to my notes and recollection. Such an exercise truly speaks to the effectiveness of complete documentation as advocated by Patrice Pavis (Complicite U.K., 2007).

as the production is characterised by action rather than dialogue. The actors themselves never speak; their actions are narrated by an unseen voice over a microphone. The narrator's all knowing never seen nature in combination with the actors' always seen never heard presence is more than a little unsettling. The dire state of a community being destroyed by a plague is emphasised in their being acted upon, but never seeming to act. The use of small bunraku-like puppets further demonstrates these manipulations, as puppeteers are inconspicuous in dark costuming, but always present, constantly pulling and pushing small levers. A cyclorama far upstage is projected with abstract colours and clouds, suggesting a distant horizon. This use of projected visuals and enhanced audio within the production links the live performance to its recorded document.

As a performance, *Light* manages to engage viewers while raising eyebrows and questions. As a document, *Light* succeeds in translating the production's intensity without intruding on the live audience or playing space. The success of the recording is summarised in my description of the video as: 'frightening, disturbing, unsettling, and horrifying,' at various points in the course of note taking. The document is not only a testament to the success of Complicité's performance, but a document which proves the possibilities of recorded documentation.

*Shooting Shakespeare* Performed by Forkbeard Fantasy  
Recorded at Hackney Empire October 2004

After seeing a recording of Forkbeard Fantasy's *The Brain* I was curious to view another Forkbeard performance on video. Both productions involved actors interacting with filmed footage during the performance. *Shooting Shakespeare* took this interaction one step farther with the plot revolving around silent film's intrusion on the fictitious 'Old Queen Theatre.' The multiple levels of play between a live

performance utilising filmed footage, and the entire production's transference to a recording provided greater depth as the comedic piece explored the nearly century-old on again off again theatre/cinema relationship. The end product is a recorded document of performance about a theatre attempting to create recorded Shakespeare in order to revive the theatre – activities which are prophesised as '...the death of theatre' (*Shooting Shakespeare* 2004).

Unfortunately, the recording fails on a number of levels. The quality of the recording is poor, and the images on the onstage screen are especially difficult to decipher. As such, many jokes about close ups that reference the onstage screen are lost on the recording's viewer. The recording itself has no close ups, which remains true to the view of a live audience spectator, but the loss of clarity in capturing the projected images of the performance greatly hinders comprehension of the recording as a document. While the production is one big eye roll in the cinema's general direction, it also recognises the impossibilities of theatrical presentation. The most telling moment of the production is when staff members at The Old Queen are subjected to a sales pitch that informs them that 'People are asking: is the theatre dead or is it just taking a nap? You better wake up chaps, the cinema kid is fresh-faced, foot-loose, and fancy-free.' (*Shooting Shakespeare* 2004). Sadly, *Shooting Shakespeare* does nothing to answer the question. Based upon the recording I would venture that Forkbeard's production is in a coma.

The *Shooting Shakespeare* recording fails so miserably because it has so much potential. The question of the audiovisual versus the live is rife with moments perfect for clever documentation. The performers and production team fails to recognise these key moments, but the blame should be placed upon those making the document. Given the technological nature of the performance, the resulting document could have

proved truly invaluable. A live performance that incorporates audiovisual recordings is already partially translated for recorded documentation. Unfortunately, the position of the camera makes it impossible to read the images on the screen while the dark lighting makes the entire recording difficult to decipher.

The fact that *Shooting Shakespeare* is amusing and prescient makes the process of viewing the recording an exercise in frustration. The potential for an engaging recording is obvious from the subject matter, and confirmed in moments of insightful hilarity. Yet, as the actors use and interact with the onstage recordings, the document viewer feels she is watching the entire performance from the lobby through a crack in the auditorium door. The performers manage to break the barrier between live and recorded for the sake of the live audience, but the documenters fail to do the same in recording the production. While this feeling of distance is often inherent to the process of viewing a recording, in the case of *Shooting Shakespeare* it need not have been. Simple lighting adjustments, the use of additional cameras, or zooming in on the projection screens would have improved the quality of this document immensely. As it stands, the recorded performance leaves one wishing for access to the live production or in need of a film adaptation.

Forkbeard Fantasy continually incorporates footage into performances, is involved in creating films, and has clips of various performances readily accessible on You Tube (Forkbeard Fantasy 2007a). The failure of this project is only highlighted by Forkbeard's considerable experience with audiovisual mediums and recording.

Forkbeard Fantasy is a theatre and film company that has been touring their shows, films, exhibitions and special events since the mid-1970s. Their theatre shows combine comedy with special effects, wild mechanical sets, outsize characters and their unique trademark interactive mix of film, animation and cartoon live on stage (Forkbeard Fantasy 2007a).

Given the company's specialisation in the incorporation of film into theatrical space, the recording had limitless potential. Forkheard's experience with creating both theatre and film should produce recordings of incomparable value. While documentation is not filmmaking, basic considerations of lighting and angle could have improved this document immensely. As it stands, it is best used for audio purposes, with the visuals providing only the visual basics of the performance.

*Our Country's Good* an Out of Joint/Young Vic Co-Production  
Performed at The Young Vic October 1998

The recording of *Our Country's Good* immediately surpasses other recordings as a document by providing additional information prior to the start of the performance. Like the live viewer, the recording's viewer is given a list of credits which provides the names of the director, designers, performers, and funding bodies. While this information is standard in a physical program, the recording does not always provide this information.<sup>26</sup> Like *Light*, *Our Country's Good* was performed on a platform stage which could be taken in from a single, stationary perspective. However, *Our Country's Good* was not recorded with the use of a single stationary camera. Multiple angles and close-ups were used in the process of recording the performance. Surprisingly, *Our Country's Good* is also a performance from which I garnered more from the audio than the visual elements of the production.

In spite of the more complicated camerawork, the nature of the production causes me to be far more attentive to the dialogue than to blocking and movements onstage. I consider this indicative of the recording's success as a document. While the recording implemented more cinematic technique than the four other documents,

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<sup>26</sup> In my own experiences in the V&A's Blythe House and University of Glasgow's Reading Room *Our Country's Good* was the only recording which provided this supplementary information.

this choice did not undermine the production which focused on dialogue and declaration rather than set, costumes, or physical theatre. The characters' relationships and the plot itself were moved forward by that being said, rather than that being done. *Our Country's Good* play within a play structure immediately emphasises dialogue, orders, the choice to speak, and the decision to remain silent. The recording manages to preserve all of these moments while providing necessary visuals.

The Out of Joint/Young Vic production is as an honest interpretation of Timberlake Wertenbaker's 1988 work – one that doesn't impose a concept, but presents a performance as the script dictates it should be presented. However, the highly theatrical style (a condition of the play within a play structure) does not correspond with the use of close-ups and cinematic techniques. The reason the audio takes precedence over the visual is due to the fact that the visuals are somewhat painful to watch. Stanley Cavell (1992) states, '[f]or the stage, an actor works himself into a role; for the screen, a performer takes the role on himself ... A screen performance requires not so much training as planning' (293). While the actors featured in *Our Country's Good* may have had the training for the live performance, their performances were not planned with an eventual recording in mind. *Our Country's Good* is a recording which makes the theatre look quaint and outdated. Actors' expressions read as garish when zoomed in on, captured, and replayed. Rehearsal scenes within the performance are difficult to decipher as humorous when the exaggerated acting of the characters' rehearsal is so akin to the serious, close-up recorded moments.

Ultimately, Out of Joint/Young Vic's co-production is a successful interpretation of a dramatic work. The recording will not revolutionise future

productions, but could greatly increase comprehension for students looking for a supplement to the text.<sup>27</sup> As a document, the recording succeeds in capturing, but not in providing a just representation. Given the nature of the playing space, the recording is a misrepresentation of the live performance. The garish over acting is a by-product of the recording, as large gestures and facial expressions would have been entirely appropriate for the live playing space. While stationary shooting may provide for uninteresting videos, such a method of shooting would have been beneficial to the documentation of this production. In response to Mary's query, 'Natural? On the stage?' in the case of this production - only if the cameras keep their distance.

*King Lear* Production Rehearsal  
Talawa Theatre Company 1994

This recording of the very first meeting of Talawa Theatre Company's director, performers, and designers prior to the start of the rehearsal process for the 1994 *King Lear* production at Cochrane Theatre does not include footage of the final performance, but allows the viewer access to conversations, decisions, and choices in the early stages of the production's creation. As a document this recording is an invaluable glimpse of rehearsal processes, director/designer/performer dynamics, and the evolution of a production from a text. For a student at any level of theatre or performance studies this document is a priceless artefact, which preserves moments of theatrical creation that are typically absent from dialogues regarding performance and production.

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<sup>27</sup> My use of recorded performances frequently raised questions of authenticity. In analysing a recording, I would compare and contrast, and having not seen the original live production, the text would serve as an immediate point of comparison. In these instances, the documents served as audiovisual aids to the dramatic text, rather than evidence of a specific production.



The honesty of this document is astonishing. The most interesting moments are those which do not directly involve the production, but show the director asking the cast if they would 'prefer to have lunch at one or two thirty?' and singing the praises of her talented team. At this moment, the performance is not a special, ritualistic, moment of encounter, but a professional project with dynamics to be played and decisions to be made. The documentation of these professional moments contextualises the performance itself and provides a wealth of the supplementary information which Patrice Pavis advocates.<sup>28</sup>

In the course of watching this recording I immediately gained a sense of the live performance which enhanced my comprehension of the performance as a recording. To attend a live performance is to encounter a production as it was envisioned; to view a performance recording is to gain access with a half-knowledge. The rehearsal video bridges the gap between the two experiences by providing indicators for the viewer to use as a guide. For example, Talawa's rehearsal video contains a long sequence of the costume and set designer explaining choices to the cast and director. Without her commentary I would have had no idea that set pieces were meant to emulate the human eye, and further the director's concept of constant watchfulness. Which is not to suggest that the set pieces were poorly executed, but that the camera lens does not capture the ideal view for recognising the eye imagery of the set.

The designer also explains her choice in costuming and the various hand props she intends for each actor to utilise. The director tells the actors, 'you've got your play things, if you don't make use of them...' and trails off with a knowing look to a room

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<sup>28</sup> See Chapter 4 discussion of Pavis' belief that recordings should include supplementary materials to better inform users of recorded performance documents, and contextualise a performance.

of laughter. To have this information about the importance of prop usage provided me with something to watch for while viewing the video. Such insights into the rehearsal process are the exact indicators which could improve the quality of a video. Merely recognising an aspect of a performance as having significance provides the recording's viewer with a direction in approaching the document. The documentation of detailed conversations about the use of scrolls or letters allows the at-home viewer to evaluate such final decisions for herself. Without the element of the live, the document viewer must be given a focus, a reason to remain attentive.

Were it not for the rehearsal video of Talawa's *King Lear* I would have been entirely oblivious to the use of a key set piece – a gynaecological table complete with stirrups. The director discusses the decision to restrain Lear on the dreaded furniture in order to display his vulnerability and total humiliation. While Lear's restraint is obvious from the recording, the specificity of the gynaecological table would have escaped my attention had I not been looking for it throughout the recording. Seemingly small decisions and moments are given weight and consequence with only a brief mention. The nudges and knowing glances that typically transpire between audience members must take on another form in order for the documentary viewer to engage.

The supplementary rehearsal document does not only encourage the viewer to tune into the performance recording, but also exists as a document in its own right. In accessing the recorded rehearsal process, the viewer is reassured that this document was created for his/her benefit. Unlike the recorded performance viewing process which can sometimes feel like gate crashing, the documentation of rehearsal is never intended for a live audience. The recorded rehearsal in conjunction with the recorded performance is proof positive that audiovisual documents are acceptable means of

approaching theatrical studies. Furthermore, the value of the recorded rehearsal for teaching about the rehearsal process is unsurpassed. As a student director, designer, or actor access to the interactions between these professionals is invaluable. The recording documents a myriad of ways of communicating, as all those involved implement textual references, personal anecdotes, drawings, models, and background research in working to begin the rehearsal process.

The recorded rehearsal stands on its own as an educational tool while supplementing the more traditional performance recording. While it would be unreasonable to expect that every recorded performance come complete with a fully developed rehearsal recording, a brief statement by a director, performer, or designer could serve a similar purpose in enhancing the value of a recorded performance. As all documents are incomplete, additional insight and materials can only serve to improve the quality of other available recordings.

Each document I accessed at Blythe House furthered my understanding of recorded performance, and the complications of creating and accessing these documents. While the success of the documents varied, each provided an adequate audio, visual, or audiovisual record. Regardless of filming technique or quality of picture or sound, these recordings contribute to the contemporary dialogue of theatrical studies. The most successful of the documents is not the sharpest and most innovative of The Blythe House collection, but the most comprehensive in its completeness as a result of the inclusion of supplementary material. The additional footage provides information and insight that clearly define the recording as a document, rather than a copy, and guides the viewer to observations. This guiding is not only applicable to the recording which it references, but informs a viewer for future viewing endeavours. The completeness goes beyond images and sound, to

educate the user, improving the recording in the process. In the case of recorded performances, more is more.

In creating effective recorded performance documents it is not the latest technology, high production costs, or fame of the company which makes these documents successful – it is the willingness of practitioners on both sides of the camera to take an active role in the process. The opportunity to express oneself for the purpose of documentation does not only clarify one's involvement, but allows for an active participation in a dialogue that continues outside of the original playing space. Here, in these commentaries and insights we find Schechner's (1988) aftermath and Phelan's (1993) remembrance. The realm of the performance has extended beyond the confines of the playing space; there are limitless avenues for participation.

## Opening Cans

The time has come to inundate the public with recorded performances.

Recordings that are available for mass circulation should be available for schools and institutions to purchase. Performance documents that can be legally transmitted should find their way onto public and educational television. In fact, the proliferation of documentary cable channels could give rise to the recorded performance channel, all recorded performance all day every day. With greater visibility and accessibility will come a greater understanding of both recorded theatre and live performance.

The recorded performance has been debated, appraised, and archived. The time has now come to approach. Timidity and tentativeness have not prepared the recorded performance for circulation as a document, but delayed the use of invaluable resources. Constant speculation regarding potential use is pointless if the documents are never used. Educators should be able to access documents that can aid their teaching, and they should be given these documents with explanation of recording specifics and supplementary materials. Students should be allowed to access an audiovisual record with an understanding of what these documents can and cannot accomplish. Archivists should have greater opportunities to explore the capabilities of non-traditional materials. Scholars deserve the opportunity to research the usage and function of recorded performances without speculating as to wider circulation.

Recorded performances will find greater use in the future if a body of work is created to surround the documents. To make a recording, but fail to explain or analyse it is to bequeath a half-finished document. The preservation of live performance is not a matter of shoot and store, but shoot, revisit, and preserve. Future generations will not only benefit from the existence of a record; they will also benefit from a body of work which accompanies a record. Viewing recordings and analysing

their content not only contributes to discourse in the present, but also improves upon the recording, contextualizing the recording and enhancing accessibility.

The future of research is technological. The preservation of audiovisual elements of theatrical performance is made possible through the act of recording. Recorded performance documents will become standards for research. Neglecting to improve recordings (both existing and not yet existing) is to leave current research incomplete for both contemporary and future scholars at every level of education.

Just as the industrial revolution introduced photography and film, so the age of electronic technology has brought forth video. The future of this medium will affect how we perceive the world around us and ultimately how we refashion and preserve it (Hanhardt 1986, p.23).

The electronic, audiovisual, digital nature of Western society cannot be denied. For better or for worse, recorded performances will become an increasingly important aspect of theatre and performance studies. The debates and the concerns have prepared users for the worst, but stalled the creation of the best.

Any process of performance documentation is rife with complications. An event ceases to exist, but remains in the memory of audiences and practitioners. The resulting evidence is never complete, but aids in the process of witnessing which follows in the aftermath of a performance.<sup>29</sup>

And there are the things that remain: a few photographs, the odd contact sheet, fragments of video, scribbled drawings on scraps of paper, indecipherable notebooks, diaries, reviews, inquiries, scars, half-remembered experiences, faint recollections, awakened nostalgias (Pearson and Shanks 2001, pp.3-4).

As one of the remaining documents, recordings exist to awaken nostalgia, generate interest, and incite recollections. As the passing of a theatrical event can be likened to

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<sup>29</sup> See Chapter two discussion of ritual as defined by Richard Schechner.

loss, recordings are one of many documents which can provide assistance in acts of remembrance. Their function will not reverse the disappearance of performance events, and the evidence provided will be incomplete. Still, their existence as documentary remains bears witness, aids in remembrance, and provides access to those without the means of accessing a production. These documents will exist as evidence for generations who would otherwise be without any element of specific theatrical experiences; it is imperative that they are valued for this function in the present. Recordings are not only adequate, but also necessary and useful.

Recorded performances are the best available evidence of certain productions and events and no amount of verbiage will change this fact. Peas are sometimes out of season and performances are sometimes inaccessible. Cans and videos have provided the only solution thus far. Unlike a can of peas, recorded performances can be opened multiple times; the supply of a 'can' is virtually endless. In order to truly preserve productions, theatre and documenting practitioners must open a few cans and put a few recipes on the label. These recordings have purpose in the present, and increased usage will improve the quality of these recordings as documents in the future. Footage has been shot and documents have been stored away. The recordings are ready to be accessed, used, and explored. The peas are there to be eaten; someone needs to pass the can opener.

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